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To the Editors

Claws exposed

Commonweal, claws exposed and teeth bared, has taken its annual lazy and tiresome leap at Catholics for a Free Choice [editorial, March 14].

One wonders what values lead the editors to praise "British frostiness" over Christian civility and hospitality. Why the constant assumption of bad motives, manipulative behavior, and "hardline" positions? (Have they bothered to learn that CFFC was the first to dub the debate about "partial birth" abortions a discussion characterized by "partial truth"? [*See Boston Globe* column by Ellen Goodman, October 3, 1996.]) Why the derisive conclusion that media crassly and ignorantly turn to the CFFC "quotation factory"? Why the demonizing and dehumanizing? Why not consider that CFFC has something valuable to say that resonates with many? Why not regard the ability to express one's views succinctly and to be heard as a gift, not a curse?

Instead of displaying petulance and, dare I say it, jealousy, regarding CFFC's success in capturing the imagination of popular media and winning increasing acceptance and respect among Catholic colleagues and friends, when will *Commonweal* look for that which is best in CFFC, that which is worthy, that which attracts others rather than what repulses *Commonweal*?

It is interesting that *Commonweal* continues its historical approach toward an organization with which it disagrees when its editor is central to the Catholic Common Ground Initiative—an enterprise that must count on wide dialogue to understand differences among Catholics. It would appear that, to the contrary, *Commonweal*'s enthusiasm for finding common ground is parsimoniously dispensed.

FRANCES KISSLING
Washington, D.C.

The writer is president of CFFC.

Fundamentalist on abortion

Your publication has a reputation as a "progressive" Catholic magazine, but your editorials dealing with abortion consistently sound fundamentalist. The magazine seems to make the passage of laws (or a Constitutional amendment?) to prohibit abortion the paramount issue of our time and the litmus test of Catholicism. Why? Even if the Catholic church is absolutely right that abortion is always and in all circumstances evil and sinful, what right does the church have to force its belief, by law, on many Protestants, Jews, agnostics, and some Catholics and others who do not share that belief? A crucial question: Who should make the decision whether or not to have an abortion—the woman (and her conscience), along with her doctor and her clergy person, or rather politicians and judges? I think it should be the former. In our pluralistic society, the Supreme Court decision in *Roe* v. *Wade* was and remains a prudent one. *Commonweal*'s editors and writers should do all they can to reduce the hysteria and fanaticism surrounding this issue.

TONY DISTEFANO
Alexandria, Va.

The editors reply:

Demonizing? Dehumanizing? Jealousy? Petulance? Ms. Kissling is overwrought. She is also as misleading in her letter to the editors as she routinely is in her presentation of the church's position on abortion. We do not assume bad motives on the part of CFFC; we do find sloppy thinking and implausible rationalizations in its frequent public statements. CFFC is wrong in its evaluation of the moral principles that decisions concerning abortion entail, and irresponsible in promoting the idea that Catholics are "free" to conclude that abortion is generally permissible. Yes, there are difficult cases and possible exceptions. But CFFC insists on making the exceptions the rule—and the rule of law.

Ms. Kissling finds it improper that this magazine criticizes her organization while its editor participates in the Common Ground Initiative. But nothing about the Common Ground Initiative requires our editor to suspend her powers of critical reasoning. The Initiative's guiding statement, "Called to Be Catholic," asserts that "the very idea of boundaries is a necessary premise, without which no identity can exist. Inclusivity, a concept that can operate at many levels, becomes a…self-contradiction when it impugns any efforts to make distinctions or set defining limits." In our view, it is precisely the concept of boundaries that is at issue here with Catholics for a Free Choice.

Mr. DiStefano is also mistaken. In brief: We do not favor the recriminalization of all abortions, but we do think that more restrictive abortion laws would better serve to protect human life and dignity. Democratic pluralism is not a justification for narrowing such legal protections.

It seems odd that those who support abortion on demand in an absolutist fashion are regarded as progressive and open-minded, while those who have grave reservations about the killing of 1.5 million unborn children each year are labeled fundamentalists prone to fanaticism.

But by all means, let us reduce the hysteria.

The high cost of neglect

The cover graphic advertising Dennis O'Brien's "The High Cost of College

(Continued on page 4)

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COMMONWEAL

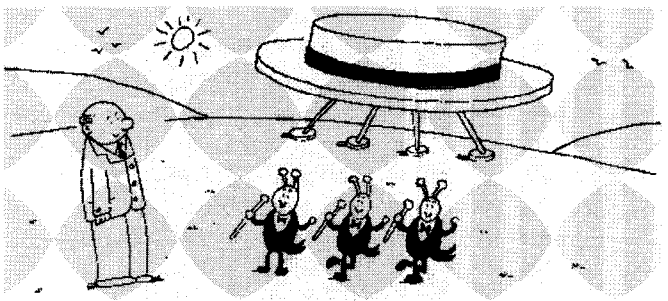
April 25, 1997 / Volume CXXIV, Number 8

UP FRONT

Correspondence *Ms. Kissling takes umbrage* 2

Editorial *Religion, true & false* 5

Et ceteras *Hale-Bopp hits Manhattan; Further sightings; She wants to be a writer!* 6



"We've come to entertain you!"

COLUMNISTS

Artful juxtapositions
John Garvey 7

Can they just get along?
Abigail McCarthy 8

SHORT TAKE

A church in Texas
Edward McGlynn Gaffney
The Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 should be upheld by the Court in Boerne *v.* Flores. 9

ARTICLES

LIMPING TOWARD CHINA
James Finn
Dealing with China requires a flexible policy that nevertheless has a clear-eyed vision of U.S. interests and values. Unfortunately, the Clinton administration is all flexibility and no vision. 11

CHINA'S CATHOLICS: DEVOUT & DIVIDED
Richard Madsen 14

HONG KONG & TAIWAN
Beatrice Bartlett 17

THE LAST WORD

What, me Jewish?
Aaron W. Godfrey 31

VERDICTS

SCREEN

Crash
Richard Alleva
An obscene little automotive romp. 19

MEDIA

PBS's 'Before I Die'
Frank McConnell
A 'seminar' on euthanasia makes for surprisingly informative TV. 20

BOOKS

Governing China *by Kenneth Lieberthal*
The Legacy of Tiananmen
by James A. R. Miles
Nicholas R. Clifford 22

Disarmed and Dangerous
by Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady
David O'Brien 24

France under the Germans
by Philippe Burrin, translated by Janet Lloyd
Steven Englund 25

Life As We Know It *by Michael Bérubé*
Harold Isbell 27

Payback *by Thomas Kelly*
Thomas Deignan 28

Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky *by René Girard*
Bernard G. Prusak 29

"I haven't read your book, but I can just imagine what it's like."

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(Continued from page 2)

Education" [March 28] was unfortunately appropriate to the article in its replacing students' faces with dollar signs, which are all that many administrators see. But a straightforward analysis in terms of dollars per student does not do justice to this issue.

It may be "reasonable" to predict outsourcing and more use of adjunct faculty, but we need to consider the effect on all the people involved: students, faculty, and their families. Faculty are not mere commodities. Will Mr. O'Brien just sit back and relax while his younger colleagues are made into a new class of migrant workers? Given the limited number of colleges and universities in most regions, any consortium would likely be sending its faculty across the country to new jobs, possibly every year, already the fate of many new Ph.D.'s.

This path will also enhance the lack of communal vision among a university faculty, with part-time faculty coming and going regularly without being allowed to develop a strong commitment to an institution and its student body.

Let's not assume that these forecasts, if realized, will have no negative effects on students. "Programmed instruction" on CD-ROM may have glitzy graphics, but when I started teaching (at the very secular University of Chicago) I remember learning the importance of human contact. Many studies have demonstrated the correlation between teacher-student contact and interest in and retention of subject matter. Further: Can a computer program really teach students to think clearly and communicate effectively? Teaching these skills is most important for the least well-prepared students but is crucial at every level of instruction. Even pre-calculus and calculus courses are taught (not just by me) for more than the techniques involved—there are fundamental ideas here.

I have enough trouble convincing my students of the importance of understanding the ideas behind techniques they would rather just assume to be correct. If I have to convince people with the experience of Mr. O'Brien of the value of the liberal arts, then I fear higher education is really in trouble.

I hope his book takes a different tone from the one I see in his article, perhaps less accepting of purported economic eventualities.

JEROME WOLBERT
Morris, Minn.

Pricing higher education

Dennis O'Brien's observations on the cost of higher education raise disturbing questions, especially about public colleges and universities. New York state is a case in point. Until recently the flagship colleges of City University—CCNY, Brooklyn College, and Hunter—were free and produced many distinguished graduates, including Nobel Laureates. Yet in the past eight years state support for public higher education has been cut from 89 percent to 48 percent. This has resulted in impossibly large classes in required courses and a longer time in college for many students who cannot get the courses they need because of overcrowding. The number of teaching faculty has decreased while in many cases the number of administrators has increased or held steady. Universities seem to be adopting the corporate model where high salaries and perquisites go to administrators and a few star professors, and the average salary of the teaching faculty has remained flat for at least fifteen years.

It is the poor who will suffer most from disinvestment in higher education. As resources dry up, they will no longer have access; once again, a college education will be a vehicle to widen the gulf between rich and poor.

Too quickly have we forgotten how the G.I. Bill changed the face of higher education in America. Sadly, higher education is no longer viewed as an investment that will repay the investors many times in productive taxpaying citizens.

A.W. GODFREY
Stony Brook, N.Y.

The author replies:

Professor Wolbert seems to mistake prediction for advocacy. I do like some of the computer instruction, but I am no more enthusiastic about adjuncts and outsourcing than he. (I note that the great management guru Peter Drucker recently predicted in *Fortune* the utter demise of universities within fifty years in favor of Virtual Reality U.). Professor Wolbert should note in the last paragraph of my presentation that "education *by* technology *for* technology may be just dandy." On the other hand, assuming that higher education can "elevate and adorn personal character," I believe that texts and teachers play a necessary role.

Professor Godfrey's letter comments on the radical cuts in state support of public higher education in New York and suggests that it is the poor who will suffer most from disinvestment. True enough, but, as a former private university president in New York, I find it worth noting that the combination of public and private colleges in that state (133 private institutions alongside CUNY and SUNY) has led to a paradoxical flight of the wealthy to public higher education—at least to SUNY. A state senator several years ago claimed that the discrepancy in average family income between SUNY and the private colleges (many of them Catholic) was $60,000 (SUNY), $40,000 (private). This sounds bizarre, but the reason is simple. When a student applied simultaneously to the University of Rochester (private) and to the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Rochester offered substantial financial aid if the family had limited means, but no aid if the family income was high enough. Thus the higher income family could save significant

(Continued on page 30)

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Religion, true & false

A lot of questionable and even silly things have been written about religion and the nature of belief following the suicides of thirty-nine members of the Heaven's Gate cult last month in Rancho Santa Fe, California. Variously known as UFO nuts, New Age dreamers, or millennial fanatics, the cultists killed themselves in anticipation of the arrival of a spaceship, supposedly following behind the Hale-Bopp comet, that would "beam them up" to the next level of existence, the "Level above Human." It sounds crazy, and it was. In killing themselves (by suffocation, facilitated by phenobarbital and vodka), the followers of Marshall Herff Applewhite, a former church and college choir master, hoped to shed their "earthly containers" or "vehicles." This contempt for bodily existence and the trappings of a corrupt and irredeemable world was manifest in the group's social isolation and ersatz asceticism. Most evident to the outside world was the cult's suppression of sexual difference in appearance and clothing. Celibacy was also required—children only complicate one's ties to a world whose end is imminent. Indeed, several cult members deserted their children to join the group. Six of the men, including Applewhite, had themselves surgically castrated.

Put together a rejection of the "things of this world" with the trappings of monasticism and (especially) the practice of celibacy, and evidently a good many people assume you get something like "religion" or even Christianity. Thus the public commentary on the cult's bizarre suicides—each cult member carried identification and luggage for the next world—ranged from scientists' bemoaning those "living a life innocent of empirical rigor" to village skeptics' praising the cult for keeping the killing to themselves or eagerly noting that to outsiders all religions appear equally "bizarre."

Perhaps the most penetrating analysis of the tragedy and its coverage was offered by the *New Republic*'s literary editor, Leon Wieseltier. "What all these commentators were trying to elide was the reality of the hunger of the soul," he wrote (April 21). "Since it was incontrovertible, it had to be controverted. For the inanity of Marshall Herff Applewhite's teaching did not vitiate the truth of what had transpired: people had sacrificed everything, and then themselves, for a spiritual objective." Yet Wieseltier rightly insisted on distinguishing between real food for the soul and poisonous substitutes. "The serenity of these men and women did not disguise the magnitude of their misery."

It certainly did not. Nor did their video-taped professions of good will hide the grisly reality of their deaths, or their detachment from the rest of reality. Mere passivity is not a reliable measure of spiritual health, just as a studied innocence or helplessness is more an invitation to manipulation than a sign of hard-won simplicity. In this instance, both were symptoms of the sort of neediness and confusion that can spell disaster.

There are ways to judge how closely religious belief and practice correspond to reality—if not to ultimate reality. Universality and longevity are two measures, although not infallible or sufficient ones. Still, a creed that has given shape and meaning to the lives of millions over millennia can claim more than a superficial

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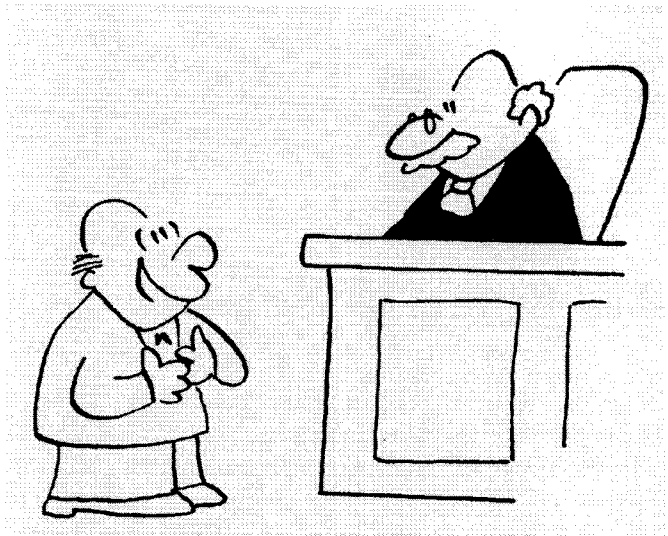

"Look, your honor—we're both Earthlings, right?"

understanding of human nature, and should not be lumped together with every passing fancy that happens to "look like" a religion.

Yes, Christianity has periodically succumbed to delusion and violence. But despite such failures, there remains a profound difference between a suicide cult and any authoritative religious tradition. Even a religion with a pope does not invest all authority in a single guru or leader. Ideally, countervailing sources of authority and an openness to the world and to other faiths constantly test the truth of any religious tradition. Christianity juxtaposes spiritual reality to the transitory nature of this world, but is careful not to consign the spirit to a supernatural realm and the created world, especially the body, to another. God, it teaches, does not despise human form or the material world, but created both and came to redeem them.

Nevertheless, it is true that, like the cultists, Christianity has long looked to the heavens as a herald of God's action. Indeed, watching the Hale-Bopp comet blaze its fiery path across what usually seems an unchanging firmament, the layperson is forcibly reminded of what the scientist is daily made aware of: that this creation is not a fixed and determined machine, devoid of chance or significant incident, but an ongoing miracle of which we are a part. Indeed, comets like Hale-Bopp, science now tells us, may have played a pivotal role in seeding the earth with the carbon-rich chemical compounds from which all life comes. So, too, Christianity has taught that the heavens speak to us of life, life in this world and beyond, and even life everlasting. Surely that is the real message trailing in the comet's wake.

ET CETERAS

HALE-BOPP HITS MANHATTAN ■ That Manhattanites hold their little island in considerable esteem is not a well-kept secret. But occasionally even New Yorkers are shocked into realizing that there is a larger world out there. Sometimes that revelation seems quite unintentional, as is evident in the following conversation overheard between a woman and a man in an Upper West Side bookstore that caters to academics and intellectuals.

Woman: "We walked across the Brooklyn Bridge. It was a beautiful night, and perfectly clear, and the view was terrific. And the comet—God, it was incredible. It even outshone Manhattan!"

Man: "Unbelievable."

Woman: "It was."

FURTHER SIGHTINGS ■ An end to *Commonweal*'s passage through the wilderness is in sight—and so is a new office. But first we want to thank the dozens of *Commonweal* friends and supporters who have written and phoned in an effort to help us find a new place to hang our hats (and heads) in Manhattan. As of this moment, we are planning to move to a building for nonprofit organizations at 475 Riverside Drive on the Upper West Side. Not every detail has been finalized, but we do want to thank all of our "Separated Brethren and Sistern" at the Interchurch Center who have so graciously gone out of their way to provide us with a home that we can actually afford.

We hope to be settled in by the end of the summer.

SHE WANTS TO BE A WRITER! ■ Jacqueline Dowdell joined *Commonweal* in 1991. She soon took us through the pangs of computerizing—Quarking, Photoshopping, Adobing—all the assorted electronic tricks that brought us into the late twentieth century. Now this wizard, and truly dynamite human being, is moving on. A fellowship for the writing program at Cornell University is snatching her away for a two-year program in which she will write and learn to teach writing.

Alas. That is why you see below notice of our need, come July, for a new production person—a Jackie clone.

Production Editor: *Commonweal* seeks a new production editor to begin work in mid-June. The position requires knowledge of word processing and page composition using Microsoft Word, QuarkXPress, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe Photoshop for the Macintosh. Familiarity with PCs, translating and archiving software, and networking is necessary. The production editor works closely with the editors, business manager, and graphics designer on a variety of production and promotion tasks. Among them: preparing copy, selecting illustrations, and creating promotional material. He or she should be organized, flexible, and able to handle details under deadline. Experience with printers helpful. Four-day work week. Benefits. Please send a cover letter, résumé, and samples of work projects to the Editor, *Commonweal*, 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

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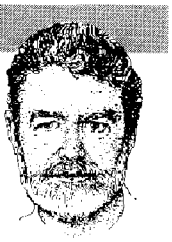
JOHN GARVEY



ARTFUL JUXTAPOSITIONS

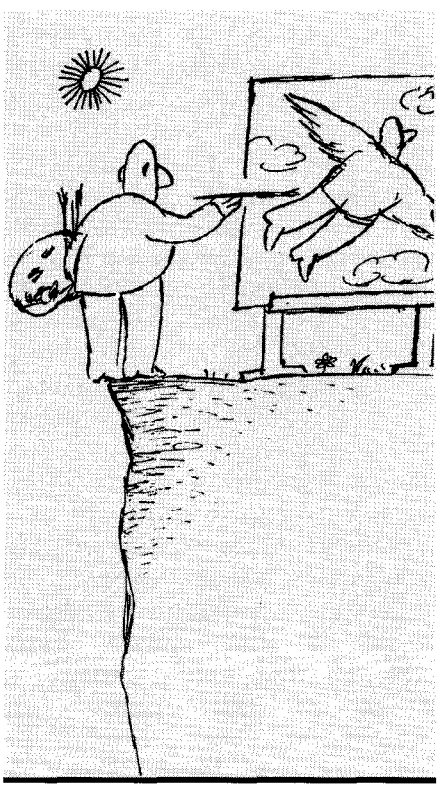
From billboards to Joseph Cornell

The Port Washington train from Manhattan to Queens passes a squarish, tapered white chimney mounted at the center of a building and painted with the strange fading words, EUTECTIC CASTOLIN. I have no idea what it means, though a dictionary informs me that "eutectic" refers to the solidification of a mixture—alloys especially—at the lowest possible temperatures. It is an oddly monumental thing. It seems to loom up from another time, maybe the late thirties, and it reminds me of my favorite comic strip, Ben Katchor's "Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer." Katchor is the most brilliant comic artist since George Herriman, the creator of Krazy Kat, and his work is full of odd businesses and fraternities, sweet regret, and a nostalgic sense that is dreamy without being sentimental, though it can be very moving. The sense of something mysterious that just barely evades our attention is there in every strip. (Katchor's work has been collected in *Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer—Stories*, published by Little Brown.)

It turns out that EUTECTIC CASTOLIN is just around the corner from the home of Joseph Cornell, a wonderful artist who lived in Queens and is best known for boxes that combine ordinary objects (bubble pipes, mirrors, small plastic toys, wine glasses, sections of magazines and newspapers, art reproductions, astronomical charts, pictures of birds) in ways that the painter Mark Rothko rightly described as magic. Cornell, who died in 1972, lived with his mother and a brother who was confined to a wheelchair by cerebral palsy in a house on Utopia Parkway. I discovered the juxtaposition of Cornell and EUTECTIC CASTOLIN while looking for his house and getting lost, and it delighted me—it seemed right that a man who made the ordinary seem so mysterious and full of magic, or rather revealed it to be so, should live around the corner from a place which had the same strange effect on me that so much of his art does.

Cornell is the subject of a recent biography, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell*, by Deborah Solomon (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). When my wife spotted a showing of his work in Manhattan, we called to see if it was open to the public (it was presented as a sale of his work), and were told we could drop by. We did, and it was good to be there. I had never seen so many Cornells in one place.

The gallery was within walking distance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where "The Glories of Byzantium" is showing. The Met exhibit is astonishing. It presents icons, sections of murals, manuscripts, liturgical vessels, coins, jewelry, and much more, all from the era following the church's condemnation of iconoclasm and extending to the end of the Byzantine Empire. The work is glorious. It still lives, and you can find it living in many Orthodox churches (though not usually so gloriously as it is found here). It was an art that was meant to be more than art—it was meant to be a way to prayer, to a sense of God's presence, to the depths of the world which open beyond the world. There is a sense in which the icon gazes at us, as we see it. It is beautiful, but that is not all it is meant to be.



I wondered, after moving from the magic Cornells to the beautiful icons, about what connections might be there, and might not be there. Obviously, Cornell's boxes and collages are in one sense as private as dreams, unlike icons. They bear the same relationship to icons as a composition by Erik Satie bears to liturgical chant. The art of the icon is meant for a community that shares a common faith, a common understanding of the world and our place in it. Cornell's art was produced in a world which has no such common understanding, though there are communities within it who still share that faith. (Cornell was himself a Christian Scientist.)

The contemporary situation has led some Christians to a somewhat puritanical reaction. Unless art instructs in some obvious way, unless it points us explicitly to belief and worship, they see it as a distraction at best, or downright evil. I have heard abstract art denounced as "immoral."

This misses the spiritual importance of any great art. I can remember the first time I walked away from an exhibit of abstract expressionism and saw the shapes and colors and light of the street in a new, refreshed way. Art does not need to represent anything to be wonderful, any more than a rock formation or the colors in an oil slick need to represent something. The juxtapositions of common objects and astronomical diagrams in Cornell's work restore a sense of mystery to the ordinary, reminding me of the poet Paul Eluard's wonderful

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line, "There is another world, and it is in this one." There is a great difference between Cornell and icons, but also something spiritually important in both. Although I may worship the Lord before icons and would never think of using Cornell liturgically, both the icon and Cornell can bring me to a profound feeling of gratitude, and that is no small thing. The delight any great art leads us to is in a way a participation in divine delight, the joy of the Lord who looked upon his creation and saw that it was very good. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

CAN THEY JUST GET ALONG?

Congress goes for Hershey kisses

Last September ("A Civil Tongue," September 13, 1996), I wrote about proposals made by various members of Congress to improve the atmosphere in the House, where rancorous partisanship and harshness in debate and discourse have become the norm. One of those proposals, made by David Skaggs (D-Colo.) and Ray La Hood (R-Ill.), was that all members of the House and their spouses take a few days meeting to get to know one another. The meeting was intended to restore a sense of fellowship to a deeply divided Congress. As many as a dozen other members joined in signing a letter to Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Minority Leader Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.) that they plan for such a postelection session.

This last month such a meeting actually took place at the Hershey Conference Center in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Over two hundred members and approximately one hundred spouses and children met for three days of friendly mixing and discussion. Unfortunately, the meeting had not been scheduled for immediately after the election when the good feeling the conference engendered might have flowed into the organizing days of the new Congress.

As it was, much that was further divisive took place between the election and the bipartisan meeting. There was the wrangling that preceded the reprimand of Speaker Gingrich for conduct unworthy of a member of Congress and the failed effort to prevent his re-election as Speaker. There were the revelations of the excesses in campaign funding during the 1996 campaign, and the rush to one-sided investigations. Both Republicans and Democrats held separate retreats prior to Hershey, where party differences hardened. In a way it was a wonder that Hershey took place at all. (Attendance was encouraged by the leadership of both parties, but, as one Republican congressman said, it was not clear that they really wanted it.)

The immediate response to the Hershey bipartisan experience was approving, even enthusiastic. "I thought it was very worthwhile," said Sylvia Sabo, wife of Martin Sabo (D-Minn.). "There is almost a hunger for, and a real need for, getting to know each other—to defuse the mystery and anger. There is no normal vehicle on the Hill for becoming closer, becoming friends. Hershey helped."

"It was very, very special—a moment in time," reported Sandie Knollenberg whose husband, Joe (R-Mich.), came to the House in 1993 when the divisions seemed to have hardened irretrievably. ("From day one you were just with other Republicans," she noted.)

"It went better than I would have thought," said Congressman Jim Leach (R-Iowa), chairman of the Banking Committee and a twenty-one-year veteran who remembers happier days. "People seemed to enjoy getting together. I was astonished at how many wanted to be there." Congressman La Hood was euphoric as he debarked from the train returning from Pennsylvania. "This is the kind of thing I'd like to see on the front page of the *Washington Post*," he told inquiring reporters.

Although the congresspersons attending contributed nominal sums, the conference was funded mainly by the Pew Charitable Trust, whose officials devised the program and provided facilitators. There was also some help from the congressional institute that serves as an umbrella under which the party retreats are funded. It is clear that careful preliminary planning contributed to the success of the conference.

The attendees were supplied with a report prepared by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, "Civility in the House of Representatives." It traced the rise in the use of vulgar and vituperative language on the House floor since 1985. Words like damn, whore, stupid, weirdo, nerd, bozo, idiot, fatso, scum, nitwit, and worse have larded the language of speeches and interchange in recent years. "It's a sign of the general coarsening of our culture," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the Annenberg School. "Things we used to say in private we now say in public. Congress may simply be reflecting a social norm."

Interestingly enough, the concern with language had been voiced at the Republican retreat in Williamsburg that preceded the Hershey conference. Participants there conceded that abusive language had contributed to some Republican defeats, and recommendations were made to make the language less confrontational, to "talk soft." "We must forget about our elections," said one congressman, "and concentrate on what we came here to do—to legislate and govern." And, according to an article in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* (March 9, 1997), referring to the Hershey conference as an effort "to reduce partisan nastiness," ordinary people may well be ahead of the politicians. There is general reaction against rudeness and a renewed interest in manners. It may be true that, as Judith Martin, "Miss Manners,"

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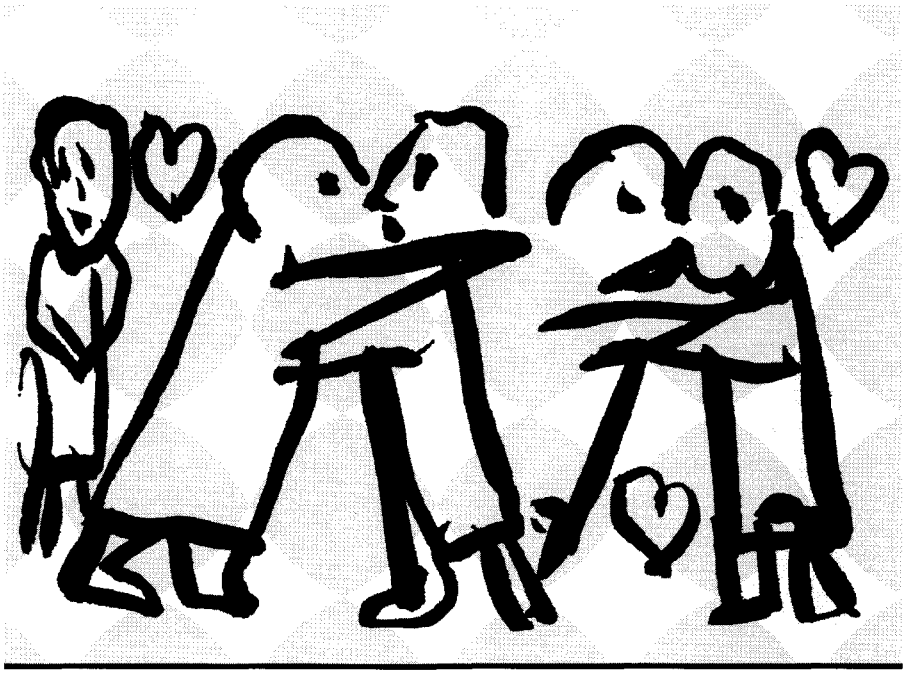
has said, "The American romance with rudeness is over."

A growing sense of this change may have contributed to the attendance at Hershey and to its spirit. A genial atmosphere prevailed from the moment the participants boarded the buses taking them to the train, observed Sandie Knollenberg, and any trepidation they might have had disappeared on the train trip. People drifted back and forth visiting with one another. They chatted, introduced their children, and played cards. "I talked to Charlie Rangel, Democrat from New York," said Knollenberg. "I had never talked to him before. He was playing cards with three Republicans."



In the opening session at Hershey, the Speaker and the Minority Leader made brief, conciliatory introductory speeches, but the tone was set by author and historian David McCullough. "His address was thoughtful, pleasant," reported Congressman Leach. "He emphasized the important role of the Congress in American history and in world history." In a word he inspired his hearers with a depiction of their institution at its best.

"There weren't a whole lot of procedural suggestions," continued Leach. "Rather, there were emphases on improvement in collegiality." He cited the instance of a Republican who rose to say that he had no idea that Democrats resented their party being called "The Democrat party," a term much favored by hostile Republicans instead of the historical appellation "Democratic," and that he would never resort to that usage again. Leach also noted, half wryly, that there had been "a fair amount of prayer" and frequent use of apropos biblical quotations. ("A house divided against itself shall not stand," and the admonition to be "repairers of the breach"). Congressional spouses thought that the socializing and the local tours arranged by the organizers did a great deal to break down barriers—especially the final dinner followed by dancing during which people mixed energetically.

But "the spirit of Hershey seemed to evaporate rather quickly," said one participant, pointing to the hostilities recently renewed in the House over the proposed probe on campaign funding.

And one of the Democratic leaders is reported to have said that all he got out of Hershey was the "kisses"—a reference to the product of the local candy industry. "But hey," said Sandie Knollenberg, "it's a start. There was some criticism. There were people missing who needed to be there, and, in a sense, there was some preaching to the choir. Many worthwhile things start small and grow. This will, too." □

Edward McGlynn Gaffney

A CHURCH IN TEXAS

Religious freedom before the Court

May the government keep Catholics from attending Mass? The answer is "yes" if the government in question is the Crown in Elizabethan England or the Communist party in the former Soviet Union. But in our constitutional republic the answer should be a resounding "no." Yet this very question has become problematic thanks to a case currently before the Supreme Court.

The City of Boerne, Texas, has not passed a municipal ordinance targeting Catholics for discriminatory treatment, nor has it expressly forbidden anyone from taking part in the Eucharist. But the city has insisted that its ordinance creating a historic district gives it—and not the archbishop of San Antonio—the power to control the architecture of an early twentieth-century "mission revival" church. Archbishop Patrick Flores wants to enlarge the existing building to accommodate a rapidly growing Catholic population. Thus the effect of the city's policy is to deprive many Catholics in that city of the Mass.

What should be an easy constitutional question has been made problematic because the Court itself made a serious mistake in 1990 when it ruled in *Employment Division* v. *Smith* that the free-exercise clause of the First Amendment does not require governments to accommodate religious conduct in conflict with laws that appear to be neutral, nondiscrim-

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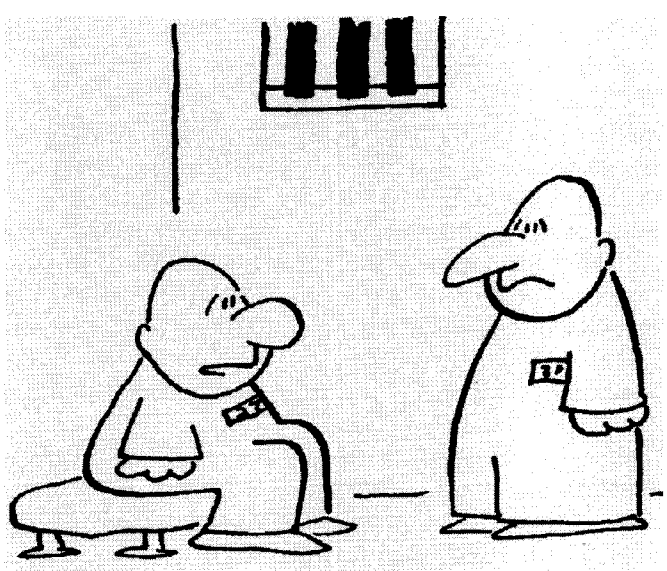
inatory, and generally applicable to all. In the wake of the *Smith* decision, Congress held hearings, and documented several outlandish violations of religious freedom stemming from "neutral" laws of general applicability. Congress then enacted—with broad bipartisan support (unanimous in the House, 97-3 in the Senate)—a statute known as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which President Bill Clinton signed in 1993.

Now the Supreme Court is in the process of deciding the validity of RFRA. In *City of Boerne* v. *Flores*, the city is pressing three questions about the constitutionality of the statute. First, does RFRA exceed the power of Congress to enforce the requirements of liberty and equality in the Fourteenth Amendment? Second, does RFRA violate the doctrine of separation of powers by attempting to override the Court's decision in *Smith*? Third, does RFRA violate the establishment clause by privileging religion over other expressions of conscience?

None of these questions is difficult. First, RFRA is well within the plain meaning of section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which reads: "The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article." The history of the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment also supports the validity of RFRA, for two reasons. First, Congress thought of itself as the government branch best capable of determining the appropriateness of legislation. Second, the framers of this provision expressly intended to give Congress broad authority to protect against violations of religious liberty by state laws. For example, the Fourteenth Amendment made it unconstitutional for states to use purportedly "neutral" curfew or zoning laws to hinder religious expression, and state laws that prohibited teaching African-Americans to read were struck down as infringements on their religious liberties.

Recent cases construing the enforcement power of Congress also confirm the view that section 5 authorizes Congress to exercise broad discretion in enacting legislation to secure the guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment. For example, in *Lassiter* v. *Northhampton County Bd. of Elections* (1959), the Court ruled unanimously that literacy tests for the franchise do not violate the equal-protection clause. In the Voting Rights Act of 1965, however, Congress prohibited the use of literacy tests to prevent persons educated in non-English speaking schools from voting. The Court sustained this legislation in *Katzenbach* v. *Morgan* (1966), thus confirming that the Congress may enact rules broader than those the judiciary thinks are required by the Constitution. In short, if the Court invalidates RFRA, it will undermine the validity of decades of civil rights legislation upon which the Court has never cast the slightest shadow of a doubt.



"Well, I guess they weren't inalienable after all!"

The city of Boerne's second argument is a rerun of its first, but dressed up as a violation of separation of powers. In effect, the city imagines that, if Congress were to behave consistently with the text of the Fourteenth Amendment, the history surrounding its adoption, and the cases construing it, that would erode the independence of the judiciary. The city invokes the venerable case of *Marbury* v. *Madison*, the 1803 ruling that established the power of the judiciary to nullify legislation inconsistent with the Constitution. But, in fact, nothing in RFRA threatens the Court's responsibility to establish a constitutional floor beneath which no official may go. But at the same time, as already noted, the political branches of the federal government are free to erect higher standards or set stricter limits on their own power. Thus RFRA no more "reversed" *Smith* than the Voting Rights Act "reversed" *Lassiter*. In both instances, Congress responded to a judicial decision by affording greater statutory protection than the Court found necessary.

The city's third argument—that RFRA is an establishment of religion—is hardly credible. To argue that any accommodation of religion constitutes an impermissible establishment of religion effectively eliminates the free-exercise clause from the First Amendment. And it does so in complete reversal of the historic purpose of disestablishing religion: to protect voluntary or free exercise of religion by guaranteeing that the government would have no power to coerce the beliefs or practices of any particular religion.

RFRA has none of the typical attributes of an impermissible establishment. It neither confers a benefit nor imposes a burden unevenly on any particular religious community. It simply leaves some religious conduct unregulated, when the government cannot identify a serious reason for regulating it or when the government has a less restrictive means of doing so. RFRA reflects a powerful legislative consensus that the government does not need to regulate religion more stringently than was the case before the Court's misguided 1990 *Smith* decision. In so doing, RFRA does not advance any particular religion; it advances religious freedom. And that is not an establishment of religion. □

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LIMPING TOWARD CHINA

Clinton's weak-kneed policy

James Finn

There have been a number of calls for a reassessment of U.S. policy toward China. Is a shift possible? Yes. Even as it is distracted by its campaign contribution troubles possibly involving China, the Clinton administration has good reasons to engineer such a shift. A second-term president presumably is freed from considering political decisions in light of the next campaign, and the new secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, is noted for her forceful advocacy of democracy. In China, the redoubtable Deng Xiaoping has been followed by President Jiang Zemin and other leaders who must fortify their new positions. More important, in essential respects, our China policy is failing.

A brief reprise of how we got to our current relations with China: The "most favored nation" (MFN) status accorded China under President Jimmy Carter continued under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. But the killing of prodemocracy demonstrators in Tiananmen in 1989 provoked criticism of China and of that policy. In the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton criticized the Republicans for not pressing China harder on human-rights abuses, a deficiency he pledged to remedy. Once in office, he issued an Executive Order that put forth a checklist of human rights and said, in essence, no improvement on these issues, no MFN. He then said that he would seek progress on human rights as part of an effort to build "a more positive relationship" with China. However, as the date for renewing China's MFN approached, Clinton found himself between a rock and a hard place. He could point to no significant improvements, yet he wished to improve relations with China. He tried to find a respectable way to extricate himself. In effect, he asked China's rulers to provide a cover, even the most transparent, to show something he could point to as sufficient enough an improvement in human rights to justify the MFN renewal. The Chinese were not obliging. They bluntly rebuffed Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who carried the message to China, and even retorted that the importance to China of trade with the United States should not be overestimated.

Faced with such intransigence, the Clinton administration buckled and dropped the executive order. The link it tried to forge between human rights and other aspects of Sino-American relations failed. The administration's subsequent rationale of "constructive engagement" was presented in different ways in different forums, but it can be subsumed under three categories: (1) trade and aid, (2) strategic interests, and (3) human rights.

Trade and aid: This is the most visible and most quantifiable aspect of Sino-American relations and has received the greatest attention. China is reported to have the third largest and fastest growing economy in the world. In 1993 the United States exported $9 billion worth of goods to China and imported $33-billion worth, a $24-billion surplus in China's favor. Through aggressive marketing by corporate America and supported by the vigorous promotional efforts of the late Ron Brown, then secretary of commerce, trade increased more than 33 percent by 1996. It has continued to grow, the large surplus always in China's favor. The sanctions that never materialized would have seriously and adversely affected business interests and workers in both countries. Imposed unilaterally by the United States, they would have rendered U.S. companies less competitive than their foreign counterparts. Those who wish to continue a policy that enhances the commercial exchanges between China and the United States present formidable arguments and are properly heard in the councils of U.S. policy makers.

Political and strategic interests: Slower to execute and evaluate are policies affecting the strategic interests shared by Asian countries and the United States: stability in an Asia composed of competing, edgy, and sometimes internally volatile countries. Add to these North Korea's nuclear policies, the future of Taiwan and Hong Kong, the regional role of Japan, and the proliferation of arms and arms technology. Those who favor constructive engagement argue that the United States is more likely to achieve a greater measure of success in influencing such matters by cooperation rather than confrontation with China. Moreover, they point out, other Asian countries want a strong U.S. presence, but prefer that the United States take a nonprovocative approach. On some of these issues the consequences of U.S. policies will not be evident for years.

Human rights: The policy makers who shaped constructive engagement argue that, even cut loose from other considerations, human rights were and will continue to be a significant factor in Sino-American relations. The United States will address human-rights abuses in differing forums and in different ways, diplomatic and political, in public and open

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channels as well as in quiet, off-the-record exchanges. In addition, this argument continues, Western values, including respect for human rights, will follow Western trade. Communications technology, for example, will prove a liberating force in China.

Developed with the fullness and complexity they deserve, and with the ingenuity their supporters readily provide, these arguments are cogent. Any position that dismisses them rather than seriously coping with them will itself not be regarded as serious. As a replacement for obligatory linkage between human rights and other aspects of our policy, constructive engagement is a defensible and promising policy—in principle.

In principle. Aye, there's the rub. If the execution of constructive engagement lived up to its promise, with no single aspect holding the entire policy hostage, there would, at this point, be something to show for each aspect of the policy. Alas, like some other policies under the Clinton administration, there is a gap between declared policy and its execution, between the enunciation of strategic goals and the means deployed to achieve them. That gap is most evident in one area—namely, human rights.

Consider, in turn, the three aspects of the declared policy and what has developed since it was adopted. Trade between China and the United States has increased rapidly and most recently has included a multibillion-dollar textile deal, long sought by U.S. firms, and agreements with G.M. and Boeing. Our salesmen, both commercial and official representatives, have been effective in pushing U.S. products. A policy on course, it would seem, until Secretary of Commerce William Daley temporarily suspended all trade missions abroad while existing standard procedures were being revised. This revision is due in part to questionable financial-political ties, such as those among the Democratic National Committee, the Commerce Department, and the Asian fund-raising activities of John Huang, who served on both.

There is another even-more-telling reason. The English *Economist*, no enemy of free enterprise or commercial interests, argued in a recent cover story (February 1-7, 1997) that governments should give up being salesmen. Today, high-level officials rack up air miles in trips to China to promote their countries' goods. Sometimes they express dismay as China massacres some people, imprisons others, harshly restricts prodemocracy dissidents, and conducts missile exercises near Taiwan. "The export salesmen insist that foreign-policy considerations such as these can be separated from the trade missions. The Chinese know better." Benefits from most export salesmanship come with a price. And that price, the *Economist* concludes, is not worth paying, in either economic or diplomatic terms. But being realistic, it expects that governments will keep their salesmen at home when pigs learn to fly.

We are not likely to see large changes in strategic relations with China in a short time-frame, and the U.S. policy of constructive engagement is relatively new. Still, the management of Hong Kong, which will come under China's control in July, will be a good test case for this policy. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has made clear this country's deep interest in the future of Hong Kong. Good. But China has already indicated that Chinese control means the erosion of the basic freedoms that Hong Kong's 6 million people have long enjoyed. Thus, the possibility of a strong clash of interests can be anticipated, and the grounds for a favorable outcome are unlikely. (Clinton's feeble response when asked whether a crackdown on civil rights in Hong Kong would disturb American-Sino relations—"Well, it wouldn't help anything"—is not promising.)

In the first news conference soon after his reelection, Clinton said that the State Department's just released annual report on human rights revealed "that we have not made the progress in human rights [in China] that I think—that I had hoped to make." This is as close to an admission of failure as we can reasonably expect the president to make. In fact, U.S. human-rights policy on China is so weak as to be virtually nonexistent. This is an invitation for China to ignore it, an invitation they have readily accepted.

The State Department report, released at the end of January, says that China's "government continued to commit widespread and well-documented human-rights abuses in violation of internationally accepted norms....Abuses included torture and mistreatment of prisoners, forced confessions, and arbitrary and lengthy detention *incommunicado*. Prison conditions remained harsh. The government continued severe restrictions on freedom of speech, the press, assembly, association, religion, privacy, and worker rights." Again: "Overall in 1996, the authorities stepped up efforts to cut off expressions of protest or criticism." And, ominously, all public dissent against party and government was crushed so effectively that "no dissidents were known to be active at year's end."

The respected annual Freedom House worldwide survey of human rights for 1996-97 gave China its lowest possible rating and asserted that "the regime continues to have one of the worst human-rights records in the world and the rule of law is nonexistent." Prodemocracy campaigners, ethnic separatists, and independent religious groups continue to be the objects of the full and oppressive weight of state power. In their own reports, Amnesty International and Human Rights/Asia bolster these findings.

The extreme care that some U.S. officials take not to disturb China on human rights may be symbolized by their recommendation that Americans attending the 1995 U.N. Conference on Women in Beijing leave their Bibles at home. And, on another level, is the administration's official reception of China's defense minister, General Chi Hao Tian, during which he met with President Clinton. The fact that Chi was the officer in charge of the brutal suppression of the prodemocracy demonstration in 1989 should not, administration spokesmen said, blind us to the need to engage China's

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military leaders nor be allowed to color the visit. A defensible position. But then the general asserted, on Human Rights Day, that not a single person lost his life in Tiananmen Square—even though the event was televised around the world and informed human-rights organizations estimated that hundreds if not thousands were killed by the army—this gross lie was cravenly glossed over rather than openly refuted by American policy makers.

The Clinton administration insists that while it is still dedicated to promoting human rights, it is also intent on developing foreign policies that are not hostage to a single plank in those policies. That has translated into an active policy in which human rights are held hostage to other interests. China, we are informed, regards criticism of its human-rights practices as an intrusion into its internal affairs and, when such criticism is offered by the United States, as an attempt to impose Western standards on another culture. We must take such reactions, however strained they seem, into account if constructive engagement is to gain a firm footing. That walking-on-eggshells policy appears to go by the board, however, when trade is at issue. China has long wanted to become a member of the World Trade Organization. Charlene Barshefsky, the administration's chief trade official, warned that Washington would block China's entry if it continued to block American agricultural goods from entry into China. China sent signals that it would respond favorably to this pressure.

No area of human-rights abuses should be slighted; each persecuted person or group merits support. But one large group has tended to be overlooked, even in many human-rights reports: those who suffer persecution because of their religious beliefs. Although it is a truly shocking fact, only a few organizations have noted that more Christians have died for their faith in this century than in all preceding centuries. Around the world they have been subjected to kidnapping, slavery, flogging, torture, rape, imprisonment, and crucifixion. Many of those persecuted have perished in China. Here one must acknowledge that, with notable exceptions, the failure to recognize and publicize, let alone combat, these abuses is shared by governments, the media, international analysts, and the churches themselves.

Today, even some U.S. officials engaged in Chinese affairs have not recognized that the Catholic Patriotic Association and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement for Protestants are government-controlled and that a large gap exists between them and the underground Catholic church faithful to the Vatican and Protestants driven to worship in "house churches." This long-standing division is testimony to the constant efforts of Chinese authorities to crush the relatively small but vital and growing body of Chinese Christians. According to American Christians, religious repression within China in 1996 was the worst it had been since a period in the late '70s. The persecution includes long periods of slave-like toil in labor camps, long-term imprisonment, beatings sometimes leading to death, house arrest and displacement, and the destruction of churches and tombs.

Although much of this information has been available for some time—Freedom House published *The Catholic Church in China* by L. Ladany, S.J. an acknowledged authority on China, in 1987—only now is the full story beginning to break through the wall of silence and indifference. Under congressional pressure, the State Department has formed an advisory committee on religious freedom. It is composed of serious and informed people, but it is too early to see if it will be taken seriously. Some members of Congress are continuing a long and honorable effort to alert their colleagues to the abuses of religious liberty in China. (One of this number, Christopher Smith [R-N. J.], described on national television our present Sino-American policy as "aggressive appeasement.") Some newspapers have recently given editorial attention to the most egregious cases of persecution; the *New York Times* published a front-page story on the underground church in China (January 26, 1997); and, in the same paper, A.M. Rosenthal has written a series of hard-hitting columns on the subject. Michael J. Horowitz of the Hudson Institute is a dynamic and galvanizing agent on this issue. Another leading human-rights activist, Nina Shea, has just published *In the Lion's Den*, a deeply informed and timely book on the persecution of Christians worldwide that also contains recommendations for action by concerned citizens.

Some religious organizations that have long sought to break through the surrounding silence are now beginning to be heard, and others are beginning to join them. The bishops of the Catholic church in the United States are keenly aware of what is taking place in China and have testified in Congress, but they have yet to mount large efforts to educate their constituents. And, unfortunately, there are religious bureaucrats who seem determined to remain blind to the situation. The National Council of Churches secretary, Victor W.C. Hsu, for example, after a trip to China with a delegation specifically charged with examining church-state relations, returned to say there was no persecution and the best way for Americans to help Chinese Christians was to support their institutions.

If the Clinton administration wishes to bring its actual policy into line with its declared policy, it must listen and respond to the voices speaking up for human rights. Human-rights issues cannot hold other issues hostage, but neither should those other issues hold human rights hostage—as they now do. Even without denying China MFN status, there are a number of actions the U.S. government and American corporations can take to show that we are serious in our support of democratic principles and human rights. Not long ago the United States was recognized internationally as a leader in the fight for freedom and democracy. We are now in danger of losing that position. This is not, surely, what Americans want, nor what a president concerned about his position in history would like to be remembered for. □

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CHINA'S CATHOLICS: DEVOUT & DIVIDED

Persecution nurtures defiance

Richard Madsen

From the point of view of an American Catholic, the Chinese Catholic church has three astonishing characteristics: the depth of its devotion, the strength of its hierarchical culture, and the bitterness of its divisions. It is at once inspiring and disturbing, and, in true yin/yang fashion, the disturbing and inspiring aspects are closely interrelated.

The first and most important astonishing characteristic is the level of devotion found among Chinese Catholics. In the northern port city of Tianjin, where Teilhard de Chardin once made his home and where I carried out ethnographic research on the church in 1993, the cathedral is filled to capacity every Sunday, starting with the 7:00 A.M. and ending with the 7:00 P.M. Mass. The morning liturgies are High Masses, which last about two hours, including Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament which follows. The singing is extraordinary. The whole congregation joins their voices with great gusto to the excellent choir, and the stone walls of the cathedral fairly reverberate with the music. On major feast days, worshipers spill out into the surrounding courtyard. For the Easter Vigil, many spend the whole night in the church.

As a sociologist, I would not have anticipated the vigorous revival of Catholicism that has emerged in the period of "reform and opening" begun by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. Christians were bitterly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-67). Church buildings were shuttered or torn down. Priests and nuns were imprisoned. Anyone who openly dared practice the faith risked personal calamity. I and most of my academic colleagues assumed that, for better or worse, this would have virtually wiped out Christianity in China. But the 3 million Catholics of 1949 have now grown to about 10 million.

Missionaries who had spent their lives in China often acknowledged that many in their flock were "rice Christians" who had joined the church mainly to get material benefits, and were in any case only superficially educated in the doctrine. Although some heroic missionaries like Vincent Lebbe (1877-1940) had pushed vigorously for the establishment of a national hierarchy, many other foreign missionaries resisted the idea on the grounds that most local Chinese clergy were neither well-educated nor reliable enough to take full responsibility for church leadership. How could poorly educated rice Christians survive brutal persecution and reemerge with an energy and enthusiasm that would put most American Catholics to shame?

Sociologically, the answer is linked to the "rites controversy" debacle of the eighteenth century. The Jesuits had advocated an accommodation between Catholicism and Chinese culture—in particular that Chinese Catholics could still carry out the rituals of ancestor veneration central to the Confucian tradition. The Franciscans and Dominicans argued that these rites amounted to ancestor worship and could not be permitted. In 1715, Pope Clement XI, ruling against the Jesuits, issued an edict that forbade Chinese Catholics from taking part in their traditional rituals. This was a disaster for the fledgling mission to China, for the emperor declared Catholicism a heterodox religion and expelled most missionaries. The church only began to grow again in the nineteenth century, when evangelists worked under the cover of Western imperialism. But the price of being a Chinese Catholic was still to cut oneself off from the ritual customs of one's society. Although the Vatican ended the rites controversy in 1939 by declaring that Catholics could indeed participate in some

"Sorry—that's not on our list of approved churches."

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of the Confucian rites (such practices are now carried out in Taiwan), Catholics in mainland China, especially in the countryside, refuse to take part in traditional funeral rites.

Funeral rituals define one's connection to the clans which are the basis of rural Chinese social structure. Anyone who cannot participate in such rituals will be truly alone in a world in which survival still depends on the solidarity of extended families. Thus, missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries refused to accept individual converts, for fear that the converts would quickly backslide. Instead, missionaries aimed to convert whole lineages, or even whole villages, all the members of which would be tied to a common chain of descendants commemorated through traditional Catholic sacraments. As a consequence, rural Catholics live in separate enclaves from non-Catholics.

Within these rural enclaves—and the vast majority of Catholics are rural residents—some Catholics are "true believers," while others are "lax." But even for the lax, their Catholicism is an indelible identity. Even if one never prays or receives the sacraments, even if one leads a scandalous moral life, one will have to be buried as a Catholic. It will be the only way to express one's social identity as a member of a particular family and lineage. In a world defined by blood and belonging, Catholic identity is inescapable.

When people are persecuted and discriminated against for an identity they cannot discard, even if they want to, the persecution tends only to deepen their commitment to their identity. This is what happened to China's rural Catholics beginning in the 1950s with the establishment of the Catholic Patriotic Association, an effort by the Communist party to control the church. As a consequence of this attempt to subordinate the church, many lax Catholics became secretly defiant Catholics. And true believers sometimes became genuinely heroic martyrs. Rural Catholicism developed the solidarity, the intense group consciousness, of a persecuted ethnicity. When the government relaxed its strictures on religious practice in 1979, Catholic communities often asserted themselves with great fervor, rebuilding and refurbishing churches and joyfully celebrating the formerly proscribed rituals. This enthusiasm spilled over into urban Catholic communities. In contrast to their comfortable, individualist coreligionists in the United States, the persecuted Chinese Christians became much more vibrant in their faith. What from a liberal Catholic perspective seems like a disastrously wrong decision in the rites controversy became, ironically, the foundation for a heroically devout Chinese Catholic community.

There is, however, a dark side to this inspiring devotion—a belligerent attitude toward outsiders. Researchers from Beijing University were amazed by the capacity of rural Catholics to cooperate with one another. Catholic villages, the researchers report, were better organized and had less crime than many of their non-Catholic neighbors. But although Catholics eagerly attend church, they won't go to political meetings. When one villager renounced his faith to join the Communist party, his neighbors pelted him with rocks. When a family-planning team arrived in one Catholic village, it was surrounded by an angry mob and had to be rescued by the police.

As hostile as they sometimes are toward government officials, Catholic villagers can be even more hostile toward fellow Catholics whom they accuse of collaborating with the government. This has led to tragic divisions within the church. To understand the genesis of these divisions, an appreciation of the role ecclesiastical hierarchy plays in the religious imagination of Chinese Catholics is needed.

Although the Chinese Catholic church is far poorer than the American church, its liturgies are far more formal and splendid. Chinese Catholics are fond of solemn High Masses in the Tridentine style, with the priest's back to the people, and stately processions with many deacons and acolytes, each office with its distinctive vestments. Although the Chinese hierarchy is steadily introducing the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, still the "new Mass" is more formal than in the United States. An autobiographical short story, written by a Chinese Catholic student who came to study in the West, recalls his shock at attending a Mass with guitars and folk songs. "He couldn't respond to the Sign of Peace...because people were shaking hands and some were even embracing each other. Then, just as he was about to receive Communion, he was startled to see that the host was made of coarse, brown bread. He left feeling that the atmosphere was just a little too warm for comfort. He never went back to that strange church again."

While the Chinese church has only recently been able to learn about Vatican II, that does not account for the formality of Chinese liturgy. Such formality, with its attendant notion of hierarchical order, is deeply embedded in Chinese culture, especially the culture of the countryside. The hierarchical splendors of the liturgy lift peasants out of their ordinary lives and give them a connection with a wonderful, orderly cosmos, not unlike that expressed through the glories of the old emperors. And not unlike that expressed today by China's Communist rulers, who rule from a Beijing Party Center, the atmosphere of which, with its status consciousness and its constant intrigues, is reminiscent of the old imperial court—or of the Vatican.

It was perhaps because the Chinese Communist party and the Chinese Catholic church are so similar in their hierarchical imaginations that they have been such mortal enemies. For the church, its strong commitment to a hierarchy culminating in the Vatican was a pillar of strength in hard times during the Maoist era. A commitment to that structure kept Chinese Catholics, though scattered throughout the country, unified in spite of government attempts to drive them apart. Chinese Catholics also remained clear about who their real leaders were—those courageous bishops, priests, and nuns who in their loyalty to the pope suffered prison rather than compromise with the government.

But the hierarchical commitments that were a pillar of strength in hard times have turned into a foundation of sand

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in soft times. Since the end of the Maoist era, a partial lessening of religious repression has brought division and confusion. Unlike in the Maoist era, Catholics are now permitted to worship publicly. The government has compensated the church for some of the property it confiscated or destroyed, and has permitted contacts with Christians outside China. The government also has relaxed its attempt to interfere in theological and liturgical matters. However, the government still insists that, to function openly, Catholic communities must be properly registered with the party and that their leaders must accept supervision by the so-called Catholic Patriotic Association.

The demands the state now makes through the Patriotic Association are loose enough that it is possible for many Catholics to work pragmatically in good faith within the association's framework. When the Patriotic Association was established in the late 1950s, the price of membership was explicit repudiation of the Vatican. The few clergy who paid that price were soundly rejected by most Chinese Catholics. But now, the "spiritual primacy" of the pope is in some sense acceptable, though clergy are not supposed to take orders from the Vatican. Moreover, in many places, bishops working within the Patriotic Association framework have quietly received authorization from the Vatican to carry out their ministry.

At the same time, the underground Catholic church continues, often led by bishops who were given secret faculties by the Vatican in 1978, and which allowed the underground to choose new bishops without going through the normal bureaucratic procedures. They were even able to ordain new priests, without giving them formal seminary training. In some places this has led to more than one bishop claiming legitimate authority over the local church, leading to ambiguity in the hierarchical order of the church. For people deeply devoted to hierarchy, the results can be devastating.

For instance, in Tianjin, where I was doing fieldwork, there were three men who claimed to be the bishop of the diocese. All of them had started out as underground bishops. During the 1980s, Catholics in the diocese were fairly unified because the government-approved bishop was widely seen as a collaborator who had no legitimacy. But when this despised bishop died in 1991, an apple of discord was introduced into the diocese. One of the underground bishops was invited by the political authorities to take over as ordinary of the diocese. He did so, apparently with the belief that he could meet the pastoral needs of a growing flock without making excessive compromises. The other bishops and some of their followers disagreed. During Mass every Sunday in front of a shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes outside of the cathedral, a sizable group of underground Catholics kneels (under the watchful eyes of secret police) praying the rosary. Exiled to a parish in a remote rural area, the leading underground bishop distributes mimeographed messages bitterly denouncing the new official bishop. If the Vatican had normal diplomatic relations with China, a papal nuncio could be sent to sort out the mess. That way, says a priest friend of mine, "all the Catholics could hate Nuncio instead of hating one another."

In some places, the divisions among Chinese Catholics are so deep that they have led to violence. In 1992, an aboveground priest died from a poisoned chalice, and there have been physical battles between underground and aboveground adherents in some rural communities. The ties of blood and belonging that lead to great solidarity among some Catholic villages and clans can set them in rivalry with other such communities. It was the hierarchy that brought these family-like local communities into a larger community of communities. With the hierarchy in disarray, the virulent forces of localism have taken over in some places. The forces are intensified when, say, one community is jealous of another because the rival got official permission to rebuild its church. The intensity becomes white hot when underground clergy associated with one community are arrested and tortured. Under such circumstances, the blood of martyrs can be the seed of division as well as devotion.

...the blood of martyrs can be the seed of division as well as devotion.

The divisions are also exacerbated by the mixed messages Chinese Catholics sometimes receive from abroad. In the United States, for instance, the Cardinal Kung Foundation strongly advocates the cause of the underground church, while other American church groups are willing to reach out to the public church. These differences often reflect theological arguments within the American church about the nature of papal authority and political controversies within the American public about how China should be engaged or contained. The problem for the church in China is that these foreign differences become exacerbated when they come into contact with the Chinese political climate.

There are signs of hope within the Chinese Catholic church. In some places, genuine reconciliation is taking place among contending factions: Underground and public church congregations peacefully share the same church building and even walk in procession together. Still, in other places tensions remain high, especially in north China where the government has launched an ugly new crackdown on underground communities.

Some of the major difficulties might be resolved through normalization of Vatican relations with the People's Republic of China, but there remain many diplomatic obstacles to this. Other difficulties might be alleviated if contending Catholics in the West were to resolve their own differences first and then interact with the Chinese church in a more informed and sensitive fashion.

If we want to help China's Catholics, we should be willing to accept their gifts of devotion and courage practiced in an environment far more hostile than most of us have ever experienced, and learn from their creativity in the face of moral dilemmas far more complicated than most of us can imagine. □

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HONG KONG & TAIWAN

How China sees things

Beatrice Bartlett

More than twenty years ago, on my first trip to the China mainland, I visited a grade-school English class where children were learning the Roman alphabet. This was not a particularly edifying spectacle, so my attention wandered to a world map on the wall. In bold Chinese characters the map's title proclaimed: "The Imperialists' Aggression All over the World." Sure enough, numerous instances of conquest and colonialism were marked in green on the map.

My guess is that the school staff did not realize their visitor could read Chinese, so they were having a secret joke at my expense. The map was surely hung there to communicate loathing for the imperialists, and to remind its viewers of the numerous affronts to national pride inflicted on China by the West and Japan. Beginning with the two Opium Wars in the middle of the nineteenth century, the map highlighted the Westerners' repeated uses of force that resulted in territorial and diplomatic losses for China. Not only were Hong Kong and Taiwan seized—albeit by treaties which the Chinese today regard as having no basis in international law—but other territorial enclaves known as "Treaty Ports" were appropriated as well. In addition, the Chinese now regard Great Britain's attempt to straighten out the finances of the last dynasty, the Qing (1644-1911), as having seriously undermined China's financial system in order to collect outrageous indemnities. According to this version of events, China was even forced to watch helplessly as the powers stipulated the level allowed for Chinese tariffs and then grabbed much of the proceeds. Today the Chinese term this infamous history the "Century of Humiliation."

The map also told me how strongly the Chinese felt about these issues, and more important, that such feelings had become part of everyday discourse even among staff members in a provincial elementary school. Recently this ardent nationalism has found new voice in a popular Chinese book titled *The China That Can Say No.* To whom is China at long last able to say "no"? To the imperialists, of course.

Chinese national pride is neither well understood nor given its due outside of China. Instead, our journals and newspapers stress the dim prospects for human rights and democracy but fail to explain the Chinese point of view or the possible long-range advantages of a return of Hong Kong and Taiwan to Chinese control. Let me describe these matters as many Chinese see them—not necessarily because I subscribe to these views, but because our thinking about these issues should rest on as broad an understanding as possible.

When Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978 following the death of Mao Zedong, he soon moved to recover China's unredeemed territories of Hong Kong and Taiwan. "One Country Two Systems" was the slogan for Deng's policy. This was a bold approach to a knotty problem: How could a socialist, agrarian China just emerging from the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and just beginning the one-child per family experiment absorb the cosmopolitan industrial and financial centers of Hong Kong and Taiwan without upsetting the sophisticated mechanisms of money-making? The policy was designed to satisfy Chinese nationalist aspirations for full sovereignty while reassuring both the local subjects and the world trading community that the local systems would be left in large part intact.

Hong Kong, a city of about 6 million people, was to submit only to Beijing's control of its military and foreign relations, but would otherwise direct its own destiny. By the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, China promised Hong Kong that it would become a "Special Administrative Region" (SAR) with its own "system"—"a high degree of autonomy" in government, finance, banking, business, and life-style, all to last for fifty years. It is as if Mexico were to take back the Gadsden Purchase portions of Arizona and New Mexico but allow fifty more years of local autonomy and U.S. legal and financial arrangements there before completing the final reabsorption.

The Deng Xiaoping government has rarely been praised for the understanding of Western and local concerns that resulted in this imaginative plan. After all, had China insisted, she probably could have taken back Hong Kong and integrated it directly into China as part of nearby Guangdong Province. (A similar take-over could probably not have been achieved against the better armed and heavily defended Taiwan.)

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Britain had acquired the 400-square-mile territory of Hong Kong in three grants. The final grant in 1898 was the ninety-nine-year lease of the large area that serves as the source of much of Hong Kong's water. It is that lease that will end this year. In 1984 some British negotiators offered to yield sovereignty while

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continuing to administer Hong Kong beyond 1997. This was summarily rejected by China. Deng Xiaoping was adamant that all of Hong Kong, including the right to administer it, had to be returned.

If the Hong Kong transfer works well, the Chinese hope to persuade Taiwan to rejoin the motherland as well. Although the Hong Kong retrocession presents problems for China, the situation is relatively simple compared with that of Taiwan. China lost Taiwan a century ago at the end of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 by a treaty that China today dismisses as illegal because imposed by force. Following World War II, Taiwan was taken from Japan and handed back to the Chinese government of the time—the government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. At the same time, Chiang's Republic of China was awarded China's United Nations seat and was able to keep the mainland Chinese government out of the United Nations as well as other international organizations for many years—a history that is bitterly resented on the mainland. But China's greatest difficulty in absorbing Taiwan will be that approximately 80 percent of Taiwan's population of more than 20 million consists of the descendants of immigrants who came to Taiwan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These people have been cut off from China for generations and no longer feel themselves to be Chinese. Today many of these people are clamoring for Taiwan independence and United Nations membership in order to forestall a Chinese take-over. In acknowledgment, China has made an offer to Taiwan that is even more accommodating than Hong Kong's: Under the "One Country Two Systems" policy for Taiwan, the island is to be allowed all the same conditions as Hong Kong plus the possibility of retaining its own military, with permission to buy weapons abroad. China will retain only the responsibility for foreign affairs. So far the Taiwan government has steadfastly resisted all such propositions.

How did Hong Kong and Taiwan become such successful entrepreneurial societies over the past half-century, and such desirable assets for China to recover? Both Hong Kong and Taiwan have long been organized to support business growth. Initially companies enjoyed low wages, low taxes, and stability through the rule of law. For many years there was little democracy and only weak trade unionism, which hardly roiled the seas on which business serenely sailed. The presence of British law in Hong Kong discouraged the Chinese preference for relationships (*guanxi*) and held corruption to a minimum; this was not true, however, of Taiwan. Finally, in the past decade investors from both places have swarmed into China, speaking the dialects of the nearby provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, and bringing investment capital, organizational skills, and technological know-how.

Under these circumstances business has recently prospered, but there has been little concern for human rights and democracy—Britain, for instance, introduced a few democratic reforms only after the Joint Declaration, and Taiwan has enjoyed similar reforms only during the last decade. The Chinese position is that, because historically Hong Kong and Taiwan have both profited without much concern for democracy or rights, surely these are not needed now.

History tells us that this is not the first time that China has set up a kind of special subregion with a "high degree of autonomy." The Qing government allowed a few fairly independent local aboriginal headman systems on its southwest border, and in the nineteenth century it permitted a substantial foreign presence in the treaty ports to be self-governing. During the second half of this century, there have been other specially administered districts, for instance for the Zhuang aborigines in Guangxi province. These systems had their ups and downs. When the local enclave could hold its own or had something special to offer China, such arrangements were successful. When the locals were weak, the center shamelessly took advantage of them. Hong Kong's business acumen and experience ought to give it the edge in the coming partnership. Whether or not these conditions will persuade Taiwan is an open question.

Business confidence is the key to Hong Kong's future. The new partnership will work well if China remembers the elements that built Hong Kong's prosperity. If China alters the conditions of economic growth and business confidence declines, the jewel that is Hong Kong will disappear. So far China has stressed business prosperity, while downplaying other considerations such as democratic elections and civil rights, including freedom of the press. By the Joint Declaration, China reserved the right to appoint Hong Kong's chief executive, and this past year it has exercised that right by putting a business-oriented party in the saddle: appointing a businessman as governor, and some say exceeding its authority by assembling a pro-Chinese legislature of "patriots" ready to take over on July 1. The Chinese have even canceled recently enacted laws protecting civil liberties in Hong Kong. Today, a large vocal group is opposing these moves and instead championing the retention of democracy and particularly press freedom, arguing that these are essential to a well-informed electorate as well as to business vision and creativity. But others disparage these same rights as irksome restraints on business independence. For Westerners schooled in the idea that two world wars of this century were fought to make the world safe for democracy, China's actions have been difficult to swallow. Still, faith in business is a point where both China and Hong Kong may be able to make common cause.

As the age of imperialism fades, the map on the classroom wall will be rolled up. What will take its place? Perhaps China's business cooperation with Hong Kong will succeed in paving the way for the return of Taiwan. Perhaps China will become more westernized through its Hong Kong connection. Perhaps the West will learn to allow China scope for national pride. Whatever happens, a new map is being drawn. One point is certain: In this round, China intends to be one of the mapmakers. □

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Richard Alleva

RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT

Cronenberg's 'Crash'

The recent successful revival of the *Star Wars* trilogy reminds us that the current split in American movie-making began in 1977 when the first Luke Skywalker film appeared. In it the big studio bosses thought they had found the formula for a hit: special effects, lots of noise on the sound track, dialogue of comic-book simplicity. What they ignored was George Lucas's attempt at mythological resonance (Luke, trained by his Jedi gurus, might be Perceval instructed by Sir Gawain or the Indian hero Rama learning from Viswamithra), truly inventive comedy (the justly famous extraterrestrial bar scene), and a certain generosity of spirit (Luke's refusal to let Darth Vader surrender himself to the "dark side"). Result: the last decade-and-a-half of soulless high-tech splatter movies with Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger and the current crop of disaster projects (*Independence Day*, *Volcano*, *et al.*).

The so-called serious movies now get made on smaller budgets by the independent companies such as Miramax, Fine Line, and Gramercy, which are usually owned, or at least empowered, by the big studios. It's as if a billionaire capitalist allowed one of his ten children to become an avant-garde painter while his nine other offspring were expected to toe the line within the family business.

Now and then, the artist-son turns out to be a real piece of work, a combination of psychosis and meanness who produces something that may alarm papa and make him wish that junior and he did not share the same name. Case in point: *Crash*, winner of a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, and now being touted by many critics as the latest triumph of "cutting edge" art.

Any review of *Crash* has to turn into a pathology report since the movie is morally and intellectually diseased. Dramatically, it's beyond disease; it's dead. Of course, the attraction of *thanatos* is the very theme of the movie, and a legitimate theme it is; only it isn't just the characters who have succumbed, but the man who made the movie, David Cronenberg.

The plot: A director of commercials (James Spader) causes a car accident that results in the other driver's death and the injury of the latter's wife (Holly Hunter). Spader seeks out the widow, not to ask forgiveness (at no point in the film is any emotion as human as guilt ever expressed), but because he became erotically fixated on the sight of her he glimpsed a moment after the collision. This vision of Holly Hunter through a shattered windshield, bleeding, one breast bared like an Amazon about to do battle, furious yet somehow alluring in her fury, is the best shot in the movie and suggests that we are about to see an erotic, Strindbergian duel-to-the-death. But no, it's just the *sight* of wounded flesh that arouses Spader, not Hunter herself. Though the couple do shortly copulate (after nearly having another traffic accident), she introduces him and his zombiesque wife to a collection of sickos led by Vaughan (rather wittily played by Elias Koteas, the film's only notable performance) who stages famous car crashes, such as James Dean's. From then on, these obsessives simply pair off—in hetero and homo combos—to have it off in the front and back seats of cars. Most of the movie is just that—soft core tableau. But don't think that Cronenberg is going to let us miss the significance of it all. "Do you always have sex in cars?," someone asks Hunter. "Yes," she replies, "but I didn't plan it that way. It's just that they all felt like traffic accidents." Yes, life is just one big bang in *Crash*.

Vaughan finally takes to smashing his car into the vehicles of his fellow enthusiasts as an automotive complement (substitute?) for sex, finally hurtling to his own death. Spader, emulating Vaughan, drives his wife off the road, then sodomizes her half-dead body, murmuring into her ear, "Next time, darling."

Satire? That's the great cop-out word of movie reviewers when they feel they have to praise something idiotic just because it's different or "cutting-edge." In *Crash*, only one scene, the recreation of James Dean's death, succeeds as satire, but it's about our obsession with celebri-

"First, tell me all about yourself."

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ty, not cars, or sex, or death, and therefore unrelated to the rest of the movie. But it isn't even cars or sex that is David Cronenberg's primary interest. This writer-director is obsessed with the human body itself, but only smashed, spavined, and bloody. His one good movie, a remake of *The Fly*, drew its power from his fascination with how Jeff Goldblum's body mutated into a monster's. But *The Fly* was truly dramatic, for Goldblum's nature changed as much as his flesh did.

But there is absolutely no drama in *Crash*. The sick, emotionless man Spader plays at the film's beginning, encouraging his wife to have sex with other men so that she can describe her encounters to him, is just as sick at the conclusion, only now he has found a new outlet for his perversity. The story never moves off square one, but it gives Cronenberg the opportunity to train his camera on scarred faces, arms, and chests, and to juxtapose sex with gory injuries and the imminence of death. There is no searching for meaning, no compassion, not even horror. It is the transfixed gaze of the obsessive who has found his object and has mentally torn it out of the context of humanity.

Literally and figuratively, *Crash* is roadkill. How then does it earn film-festival prizes (to his everlasting credit, the Cannes jury head, Francis Ford Coppola, tried to block the award) and the genuflection of critics? The perfect answer to that is in a passage from Grover Sales's book, *Jazz: America's Classical Music*, where the author defines the French phrase, *l'avantgarde pompier*, as "phony avant-garde, spurious work passing itself off as genuine avant-garde, preying upon the vulnerability of upwardly mobile enthusiasts unsure of their own taste and desperately afraid of being caught culturally short like the detested bourgeoisie of yesteryear that denounced Stravinsky, Picasso, and Charlie Parker as anarchists and fakes."

Today, the heads of Independent film companies, festival chairpersons, and most critics are precisely those "upwardly mobile enthusiasts." This is not the last time we will be *crash*ed. □

Frank McConnell

DEATH ON TRIAL

PBS's 'Before I Die'

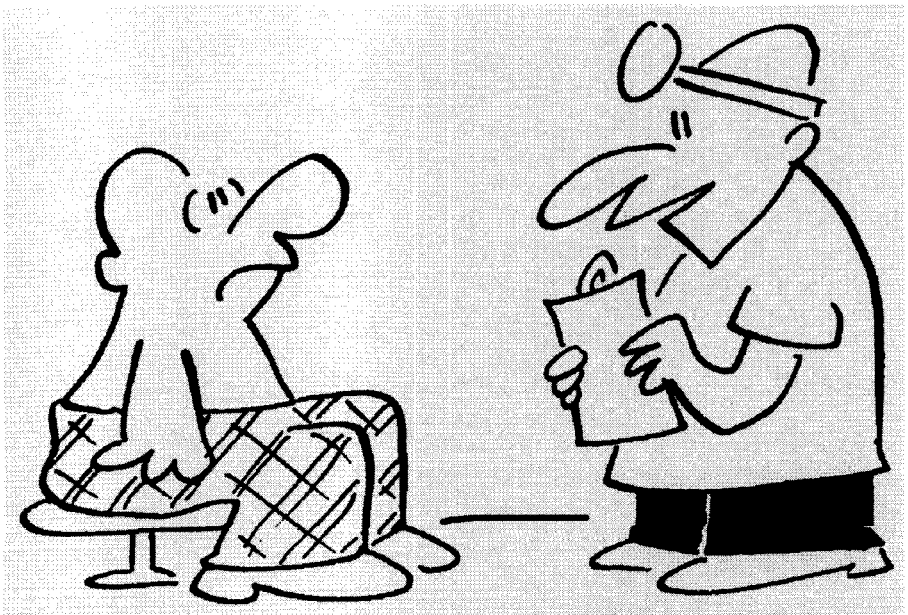
Man has "invented death," wrote Yeats, and the poet was absolutely right: As the only animals who *know* that we will die, we are also the only animals subject to anxiety, hope, religion, and the future tense. (As Milan Kundera says, all the other animals still live in an eternal present—in Eden.) It's been suggested—and I believe it—that the birth of consciousness is really the birth of the consciousness of mortality. So you can invert Yeats's proposition: Death has invented Man.

At century's end, though, the fact of death has taken on an unprecedented and distressing complexity. As technology spreads ever wider its wings—angelic or demonic—we're less and less sure what death is, when it actually occurs, and, most frighteningly, when to declare it.

My dearest classmate from Notre Dame (1964) suffered a massive coronary on the streets of Oklahoma City eight years after graduation. Since he was from a family of millionaires, he was put on life support even though all brain functions had ceased. It was more than a decade later when I read that prayers were requested for his repose. In other words, somebody had finally pulled the plug, cut off the IV, pushed the OFF button. And this was *humane*? This was *moral*?

The Catholic position—and the position of most churches—is flexible about discontinuing "useless" medical intervention, but unalterably opposed to euthanasia. But how do you oppose euthanasia (Greek *eu* = "pleasant" + *thanatos* = "death") when medicine, in its triumphant, indeed explosive progress, is continually blurring the very definition of *thanatos*?

"Before I Die: Medical Care and Personal Choices," which airs April 22 on PBS (check local listings), is a panel discussion—WNET New York, the parent station, calls it a "seminar"—about just this riddle. It is one of the "Fred Friendly



"If you don't learn to stop worrying, you'll die a horrible death."

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Seminars," those open-ended, frank, and articulate discussions of important matters that have graced PBS with their intelligence since 1984. (Friendly is one of the truly great men in the history of television; along with Edward R. Murrow, he *made* TV news the noble thing it once was.) Flawed and occasionally maddening as the show is, it is eminently worth watching.

There are fourteen panelists on the show, including doctors, nurses, philosophers, a rabbi, and a minister. Arthur Miller of Harvard Law School is the host and master of ceremonies, and a more cloyingly self-satisfied one—except if it were Phil Donohue—would be hard to imagine. Miller, wielding his coffee mug like a scepter of office, struts before the seated panelists and asks them to "role-play" various scenarios about death, dying, family, and finances.

Now, in the first place, I've always thought that "role playing" was a goofy evasion of responsibility: If grown-ups can't *talk*, then they're not really grown-ups. And, in the second place, I'd bet the ranch that Brother Miller didn't have a damn thing in his coffee mug during the taping, and props that are just props tick me off.

But despite the creakiness of the setup, the hour produces discussion of real value. The three proposed scenarios, delicately calibrated, gradually increase the urgency—and difficulty—of making decisions about death in our current medical and ethical fog.

First case: A young mother has breast cancer. It's treated, but it comes back, and metastasizes to other parts of her body. Radical mastectomy, chemotherapy, everything is employed—but still the cancer is there, and spreading, and she is going to die. Does her physician attempt "experimental techniques" to prolong her life, or does he concentrate on measures to ease her pain in her last days? And what is her say in this? And what about the fact that her HMO may well offer her a fat sum (for her kids' education) to refuse treatment and die sooner rather than later?

Second case: An older guy, sixty-five or so, is still in the pink of health. But his physician convinces him to sign an "advance directive"—a statement that, if he is ever incapacitated beyond reasonable hope and on a life-support machine, the machine should be turned off. And then he has a catastrophic stroke, and is hooked up to the machine. (This is pretty close to the situation of my Notre Dame friend.) So how much does the "advance directive" really count—especially if his children are at odds about whether to let him die or not? And is the directive really legal if, maybe (but who can tell?), he doesn't want to die *now*?

Third case: A guy has advanced AIDS. He checks into a hospice, but still wants his doctor to promise him that, when the time comes, he will be provided the means to end his own life with something like dignity, something other than the howling chaos and loss of self which death from AIDS often is. And where, sufferer or caregiver, in the face of that immitigable enormity, are your abstract principles now?

I said that the scenarios were calibrated. But they do depict situations that occur every day. Remarkably, the doctors, nurses, ethicists, and ministers all agree that choosing death, even *in extremis*, is an unacceptable option, however alluring it may sometimes be. (I disagree, but this is not the right venue to argue my case.) And they also agree that the American health-care system is a galloping disaster, having turned "death"—whatever that means now—into a marketable commodity, as in "you got the bread, we'll keep you alive; you don't got the bread, you die." This, in fact, is *fact*.

The participants also, astonishingly, all agree that the root of the dilemma is not technological but spiritual. By quantifying death, we have "de-qualified" it, robbed it of its ancient status as, not simply the cessation of life, but its consummation. The question is whether we can ever really return to that insight, or whether we have, irreversibly, traded the concept of "death" for that of "autopsy."

"Before I Die," sometimes silly but often fine, is an important contribution to the conversation. □

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Figuring out who runs China

Governing China
From Revolution through Reform
Kenneth Lieberthal
W. W. Norton, $30, 498 pp.

The Legacy of Tiananmen
China in Disarray
James A. R. Miles
The University of Michigan Press, $29.95, 379 pp.

Nicholas R. Clifford

Kenneth Lieberthal's book, though published two years ago, remains one of the best guides to the way in which China is governed. Or perhaps more precisely, the way in which China is run, since government is only part of the picture. The question is important, and not just because of Deng Xiaoping's death or America's difficult relations with the People's Republic, but because, as the author points out, when a country with 22 percent of the earth's population posts economic growth rates of 12 percent a year, the world sits up and takes notice.

After a rapid traversal of Chinese history since the late nineteenth century, Lieberthal examines the legacy of Maoism which Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues inherited on the Great Helmsman's death in 1976, and the ways in which they have modified—not to say buried—much of what he had done. Mao, always fond of seeing contradiction (*maodun*) as one of the primary motors of history, left a China riven by contradictions: the creation of massive institutional structures—government, party, army—whose legitimacy and integrity he undermined; a cadre of devoted and experienced revolutionaries (Deng Xiaoping among them) whom he set against one another; and the beginnings of a modern educational system which he undercut in his attacks on and persecution of intellectuals.

As many have pointed out, Deng's primary goal since the late seventies was to restore the legitimacy of party and government, shattered as they were by Mao's Cultural Revolution, and by the ways in which rapid ideological changes (the heroes of yesterday becoming today's villains only to emerge as heroes again tomorrow) strained the belief of even the most credulous. So Deng made a deal with his countrymen: The party would find ways for them to improve their lives, and they, in turn, would raise no awkward questions about the party's monopoly of political and ideological authority. And it was a deal that worked—at least up to a point. Since the late seventies, China has posted a growth rate averaging 9 percent a year, and tens, if not hundreds, of millions of people have been lifted out of conditions of poverty and mere survival into a life of hope.

"Yes, I'm in management myself."

These are enormous accomplishments—and if the price has been the destruction of communism, so much the worse for communism. For no one today, except the truest of Old Believers, would maintain that China is any longer a Communist state. Lieberthal does not put the matter quite so bluntly. But he does a superb job of examining the complicated interplay among society, government, party, economics, and ideology, always conscious of the way in which the heavy hand of the past (pre-Maoist as well as Maoist) can sometimes stymie the best efforts of the reformers.

Thus he digs under the organizational charts to examine the complexities of relationships, both institutional and personal, that define the way China is run. At the top, despite its masses of institutions and organizations, the government remains a tiny and highly personalized power elite of no more than some twenty-five to thirty-five people. Grouped around a core leader (Jiang Zemin at the moment), they define the real rules of the game and are constrained by no body or law or set of rules, but only by one another. Groupings of bureaucracies—the *xitong*—deal with the tasks set by the top leadership in fields such as finance, foreign affairs, party affairs, and so on, and yet are almost invisible on the charts. The military is one of the most important, for though there is a Ministry of Defense and a state Military Affairs Commission, they have little power, and the army is answerable only to the Military Affairs Commission of the party.

As Deng had to deal with Mao's legacy, so Deng's successors, whoever they may be in the long run, will have to deal with his. Of that legacy, perhaps nothing is more important than the

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still unresolved contradiction between rapid economic development and the social and cultural change it inevitably brings. Even the most cursory reading of Marx insists on this relationship, and one of the ironies of China today is that those who profess to be Marxists ignore this most central of the old man's doctrines.

James Miles was the BBC's man in Beijing from 1986 to 1994, and much of his book examines the ramifications of Marx's observation. *The Legacy of Tiananmen*, as its title suggests, takes a bleaker view of China's future prospects than one would gather from simply reading economic statistics or the optimistic assessments of foreign businesses looking to the China market. "China is now facing the most uncertain period of its political life since the Communists came to power," Miles writes. If conventional wisdom holds that China has put the memories of June 4, 1989, behind it, and is simply following Deng's echo of Guizot—*enrichissez-vous*—Miles believes that the Beijing massacre remains the country's most divisive political issue. He predicts that it may be less easy to cover it up after Deng's death, and that sooner or later, for its own psychic health, China will have to account for it. Will it lead to what the Chinese call a "reversal of the verdict," so that those still condemned by Beijing as a "small handful of counterrevolutionary troublemakers" will in fact emerge as tomorrow's democratic heroes?

Probably not for a while, anyway—though this February the Chinese general slated to command the garrison in Hong Kong hinted some change might be coming. While Miles is by no means a prophet of doom, he remains highly conscious of the country's weaknesses. June 4 was only part of the problem; the collapse of communism abroad, and—two years later—of the Soviet Union were severe blows to the prestige of a party which, however it acted in fact, always publicly maintained the theory of international proletarian solidarity. Like Lieberthal, Miles is wary of the ability of a Leninist political system to deal with questions of succession, noting the fall of two of Deng's earlier handpicked successors—Hu Yaobang (in 1987) and Zhao Ziyang (in 1989). Will Jiang Zemin fare better?

The suppression of dissent in 1989 also brought a severe slowdown in China's economy, in part to control the skyrocketing inflation that had been one of the causes of the earlier unrest. Miles's description of the way Deng managed, in his "southern tour" of February 1992, to reignite economic growth against the wishes of the more conservative members of his party, is particularly well done. But the whole episode does leave one with the question of whether Deng's successors—who for a number of reasons lack his legitimacy—will be able to deal with such questions.

That autumn, in an apparent victory for Deng's views of reform, the party came out clearly for "market socialism" (whatever that odd term might mean). And though economic growth and inflation both quickly rose into double digits, according to figures released in January 1997, inflation in 1996 dropped from over 17 percent to just over 8 percent, while economic growth fell to just under 10 percent. This "soft landing" is a considerable accomplishment. But have the real problems—some man-made, some the legacy of Mother Nature—been solved? The drag exerted on the economy by the many huge state-owned and money-losing enterprises grew even worse in 1996, and while every year China's leaders promise to deal with these issues, they are as unwilling to grasp the nettle as America's leaders are to reform campaign financing. Tens of millions of workers would find themselves without jobs, and the cities, already crowded with refugees from the countryside, would face even greater threats of instability than now exist. Much easier to continue to pay the subsidies these failing industries demand, and hope that somehow the problem will go away.

Like Lieberthal, Miles worries about corruption, its possibilities enormous in what is still only a semi-reformed economy. Unlike Bill Clinton, neither author is sanguine about China's evolution toward democracy (following the pattern set by, say, Taiwan or South Korea). And while neither predicts China's collapse (at least as long as the army stays unified), an increasing regionalism and provincialism may further weaken the power of the center (much as it did, it might be added, during the late nineteenth century as the Qing dynasty was falling apart).

Finally, both writers are concerned by the recrudescence of nationalism, dredged up and dusted off in the last several years to take the place of a moribund socialism. And it is here, perhaps, that the outside world, in dealing with China, will face its greatest challenges—particularly, I think, in the case of Taiwan which, after Hong Kong and Macau return to the motherland in 1997 and 1999, will be the only remaining part of Chinese territory not yet brought under Beijing's control.

In January 1997, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted several observers who deplored the negative picture of China given by Western journalists. Though the image of China is one of a tightly run, brutal

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dictatorship, said Lieberthal, "the reality is that Chinese society is extraordinarily dynamic and there's just a huge amount going on in terms of social change." And, according to Anthony Saich of the Ford Foundation, though the dominant view is that the human-rights situation has never been worse, in fact it has never been better.

Beijing, of course, is much exercised over its image, and has castigated foreign reporters for their unhappy picture of China, calling on them instead to emulate Edgar Snow—the old "friend of China" of sixty years ago. But, asks Jonathan Mirsky of *The Times* (London), which Edgar Snow do they mean? The Snow whose *Red Star over China* (1938) helped to undermine the despotic yet legitimate government of the Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists? Or the Snow who, out of deference to his Maoist hosts in the early 1960s, chose to look the other way and ignore the evidence of what was the greatest famine in human history?

"There are few more important issues facing the West than managing China's emergence as a great power," wrote the *Economist* in May 1996. It took Warren Christopher eighteen months after his appointment to make his first trip to Beijing; it took Madeleine Albright a matter of days. Perhaps that's a sign that, after years of drift under both Bush and Clinton, Washington is at last trying to forge a real China policy. □

Nicholas Clifford *is the author of* House of Memory *(1994).*

PHIL & DAN AT WAR

Disarmed and Dangerous
The Radical Lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan
Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady
Basic Books, $30, 421 pp.

David O'Brien

On February 12, 1997, at 4:30 in the morning, Philip Berrigan, Tom Lewis-Borbely, and three others entered the grounds of Bath Iron Works in Maine and hammered and spilled blood, their own, on the missile launch tubes of a billion-dollar Aegis destroyer. A few hours later, West Bath District Court Judge Joseph Field set a probable cause hearing but refused to jail the protesters. According to press reports, Judge Field said of Philip Berrigan: "He is a moral giant, the conscience of a generation."

Berrigan and Lewis-Borbely go back a long way. They were first arrested together for the pioneer draft board raid, "the Baltimore Four," in 1967. Since then, they have spent a lot of time in jail, seven-and-a-half years for Berrigan. When not in jail they live with their families in poor neighborhoods, Berrigan in Baltimore and Lewis-Borbely in Worcester, Massachusetts. Berrigan's brother, Jesuit Daniel, now seventy-five, appears regularly at protest vigils in New York, and ministers to cancer and AIDS patients. His missile-hammering days may be behind him. But these Berrigan brothers and their friends are, among many other things, stubborn.

Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady have done a public service by reconstructing the "radical lives and times" of the two best known of the six Berrigan brothers. Family life for the Berrigans in upstate New York in the Depression-era was hard. Their dad, "Dado," never brought home much money, he brooded over his failures, bullied his wife and sons, and long after he was gone he took hard shots in the sons' memories. His anger overwhelmed the love of their mother, Freda, and made leaving home easier. Still, the bonds of family remained tightly drawn, for life. And the faith was passed on, sending Daniel off to the Jesuits and Philip to the Josephites, after a full taste of war. It is only then, when discussing Phil's vocation, that the biographers mention that Dado left copies of the *Catholic Worker* around the house and helped set up a Catholic Interracial Council in Syracuse.

Amid the conformist self-congratulations of fifties' Catholicism, restless and relentlessly honest men like the Berrigans created discomfort, not least for themselves. It began as fairly modest efforts to awaken the lay apostolate and challenge the church's own racism, then to respond to Pope John XXIII and the council, then to confront their country's bloody war in Vietnam. By then they were hardly alone; a surprising Catholic peace movement captured national attention, and the church at all levels began to face the problems that had long troubled them. But it was never enough, less because they were radicals, which they were, than that the nation's capacity for violence, and self-deception, was far greater than anyone suspected.

Polner and O'Grady make it clear that it was never easy for Dan or Phil. Dan loved the Jesuits, he seemed to thrive in an academic environment like Cornell University, he was a very good poet, and he enjoyed the company of some powerful people. But he worried about unmerited suffering and his more relentless brother pulled at him. And Phil, the authors show, had his own vulnerable points: He needed Dan as he later needed his wife, Elizabeth. Both loved being part of the church, and were hurt that some Catholics seemed more angry at them than at the warmakers. Even leaders of the old Catholic peace movement had reservations about the tactics of the Berrigan-led "ultraresistance."

The heart of the book spans the years of intense protest, from Dan's exile to Latin America for upsetting Cardinal Francis Spellman to the Harrisburg conspiracy trial for an alleged plot to kidnap Henry Kissinger. The nearly twenty-five years since the trial take a smaller proportion of the book, though we learn of the Plowshares antinuclear actions, like

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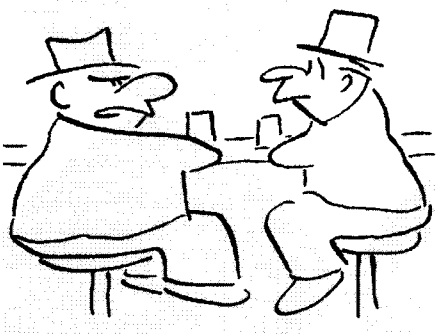
that at Bath, of controversies over the Middle East, Vietnamese human-rights abuses, abortion, of Daniel's growing commitment to pastoral care for the dying, and the commitment of Phil and his wife Liz to raise a family while spending considerable time in jail. This last section is understandably the least satisfying: We would like to know more about these men as they have lived their beliefs after the spotlight went off.

There is no hagiography here. Both men seem eligible for much forgiveness because they had such a tough dad. The authors make plain that, while brother Jerry became an ally and at times a co-conspirator, the other Berrigan brothers had little sympathy for their radical actions. But the ties of blood, and simple fraternal affection, are extremely strong. The authors describe faults, impatience, occasional hyperbole, touches of self-righteousness, but they also make clear that Dan and Phil have acknowledged them. But the book is "life and times" history, better at describing events colleagues, background, and strategy than at probing the depths of motivation or even searching the great body of Berrigan writing for clues to their inner life.

The authors know that the Berrigans differ from other famous radicals because they are Catholic, very Catholic. Phil still murmurs the Jesus prayer while painting houses and prays from the Scriptures of the day's liturgy. And they are undoubtedly a certain type of Catholic, with that deep assurance that can deal with defeat. They are also very American: They said more readily in the sixties that they wanted to save the country from continuing dishonor. Later they seemed to despair of the civil faith, and so their Catholic faith seemed deeper, perhaps more sectarian, because it no longer had that American trust in the people and hope for their future as its intimate companion.

In the end, the authors think Dan and Phil did what they set out to do, to challenge the "moral rot" of national policy: "Despite their imperfections...the Berrigans honored the country and the world in this, the bloodiest century in human history." They helped move their church on questions of war and peace, they inspired other good people to do good work, they loved their friends and family, they stayed the course.



"Yeah, I believe in nonviolence—you want to make something **out** *of it?"*

A Maine judge thinks Phil is the conscience of a generation, and one Jesuit told Polner and O'Grady he thinks Daniel "the greatest Jesuit since Ignatius." On the most important issue of their time, nuclear weapons, they faced the truth while far too many spent their talents seeking ways to justify the unjustifiable. The gifted moderates now seem convinced that they helped "our" side "win" the cold war, while the Berrigans still prefer, in Dan's words, "to be as marginal as possible to madness." It is possible that only on those margins, with people like these, that alternatives to madness can be imagined, a necessary step to the much desired renewal of our country and our church. □

David O'Brien *teaches history at Holy Cross.*

A NATION OF PATRIOTS

France under the Germans
Collaboration and Compromise
Philippe Burrin, translated by Janet Lloyd
The New Press, $27.50, 530 pp.

Steven Englund

Consider the French. They march through history saddled with this huge reputation for collective self-esteem—for nationalism. "France, a Nation of Patriots" was not only the title of a famous study by the great (Catholic) historian, Carlton J.H. Hayes; it is also a universally accepted description of the French state of mind. Then along come books like Philippe Burrin's to make hash of things. Or to make us think about what "nationalism" really is.

La France à l'heure allemande—the book's more dramatic French title—first appeared four years ago and established itself as the best general, one-volume synthesis on a topic as delicate as it is complex: France and the French, 1940-44. With an eye for cogent detail and an ear for sound generalization, Burrin embraces all aspects of his topic. From high state policy to low business machinations, he offers a comprehensive look at state and society in the four years that France stood "for herself alone," as Charles Maurras put it. Only the Resistance escapes the author's dragnet. That lacuna—no small one, admittedly—plus the fact that the author has been mediocrely served by his translator, are the only things to regret in an otherwise splendid study.

The true excellence of this book is not confined to its panoramic vision. If Burrin is unhesitating in his tough judgments, he escapes the procurator's voice of indictment—as Robert Paxton did not, in his classic *Vichy France*—thanks to his taste for distinctions and a writerly feel for detail that is human, humane, and humorous.

First, the distinctions. Aptly, for a Swiss scholar, the author displays a singular talent for nuance. Nowhere else

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have I read so convincing an examination of the differences between accommodation and collaboration, or among inevitable, opportunistic, and active collaboration. Burrin concludes with a sentence that I suspect more French historians than just this reviewer will be envious of for its elegant economy: "To be a hero is honorable; not to be one is not necessarily dishonorable."

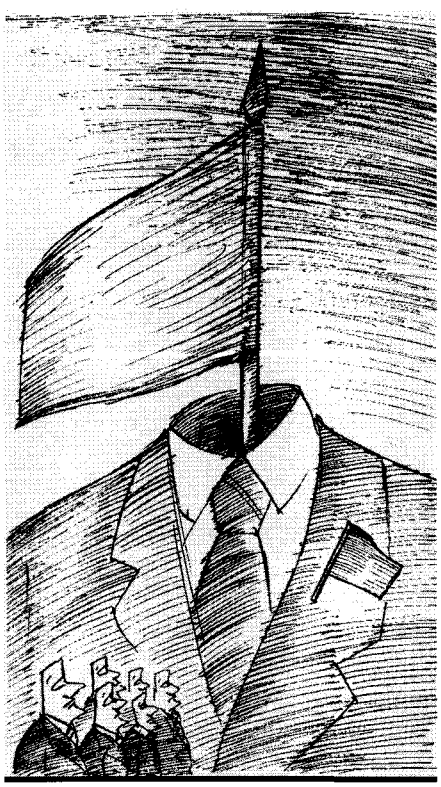
Burrin shows that the defeat of 1940 allowed French rightwingers to construct in the Nazi shadow a regime far nearer their hearts' design than the hated Third Republic. It was this political project, not the "salvation of the nation," he says, that remained their priority "right up until the moment when it collapsed in infamy." "*L'État français*," as it was called, conferred a legitimacy upon nefarious policies, such as turning over French Jews to the Germans, that was not readily available elsewhere. "Although the other occupied societies of Western Europe produced more supporters and recruits for collaborationism," Burrin writes, "they at the same time provide examples of civil resistance the likes of which are not to be found in France...."

But the hardest part of Burrin's book for a French audience, I would imagine, is his deployment of might-have-beens. French public opinion, he shows, was never pro-German, never enthusiastically favored Vichy's "national revolution," never ceased hoping for an English victory. The average Frenchman "manifested toward collaboration sentiments that ranged from scepticism to hostility."

For this reason, the France of 1940, on Burrin's telling, might have restored the national unity she had lost in the 1930s by refraining from cooperation beyond the necessary with the Germans. Resisting Hitler "would have provided a rallying point for the germanophobia of the national right, the liberalism of the center, the antifascism of the left, and the antiracism and antipaganism of the Catholic world." Vichy, in short, might have "opted for an armistice government that remained republican, and sought to protect its trump cards—the free zone, the fleet, and the empire—deciding that the last word would not have been said so long as England continued to resist."

In August 1944, Pétain told his compatriots: "Even if I have not been able to be your sword, I have tried to be your shield." Philippe Burrin makes the truly devastating reply: "He might have addressed that remark more truthfully to Hitler."

Books such as Burrin's can make us reconsider how we think about "nationalism." Is it best described as over-ardent country-love—but is that a suprapolitical or apolitical sentiment? Nationalists themselves would have us believe their motivations are a profound feeling of devotion to the common good. Burrin cites copious evidence indicating that the men of Vichy, and even the arch-collaborationist Frenchmen living in occupied Paris, claimed an outsized love of France as their *raisons d'agir*. Burrin, for his part, finds them guilty of pursuing other politico-ideological projects, not "the salvation of the nation." Now I happen to agree with this judgment as far as it goes, but I also find it a bit naive and old-fashioned, tendentiously relative to a particular (Gaullist, postwar) point of view.



If, instead, historians were to construe nation-talk as the quintessentially political language it is, then they would be denied their cheap surprise and delicious ironical cluckings at how "patriots" and "nationalists" so often sell out their countries, but they would gain a savvier estimate of nation-talk for what it is—politics by other, "apolitical" means. Specifically, in the French case, to say the French are "highly nationalistic" is to say they are highly political. Which, in turn, is less a statement about how united, than about how divided they actually are. "Nationalism," or nation-talk, is simply one way (and a rather effective way) politics gets done in France.

I save the best for last. I noted above Burrin's wonderful touch for the human and the humorous. At the height of the occupation, playwright Paul Claudel, a deeply conservative Catholic hardly known for his phobia to the Nazis, nevertheless felt obliged to speak out. The impulse to do so was a splendid requiem Mass, to which the Germans sent appreciative wreaths, that the church accorded Cardinal Baudrillardt, rector of the Catholic Institute in Paris and a prelate who feared communism far more than he feared the Nazis. The obsequies were held at the same time as the Germans shot twenty-seven French hostages in Nantes, an act greeted by silence from "*l'Église de France*." Wrote Claudel to Cardinal Gerlier, archbishop of Lyon and France's nominal primate: "When the cardinal reaches the other side, the twenty-seven dead hostages, at the head of an army that is growing daily, will slope arms and act as his guard of honor. For that emulator of Cauchon [bishop and president of the ecclesiastical tribunal that convicted Joan of Arc], the French church could not lay its hands on enough incense. For those sacrificed Frenchmen, there was not a prayer, not a single gesture of charity or indignation. A day will come, Eminence...." □

Steven Englund *is completing a study of the political significance of the idea of "la Nation" in French history.*

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A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Life As We Know It
A Father, a Family, and an Exceptional Child
Michael Bérubé
Pantheon, $24, 284 pp.

Harold Isbell

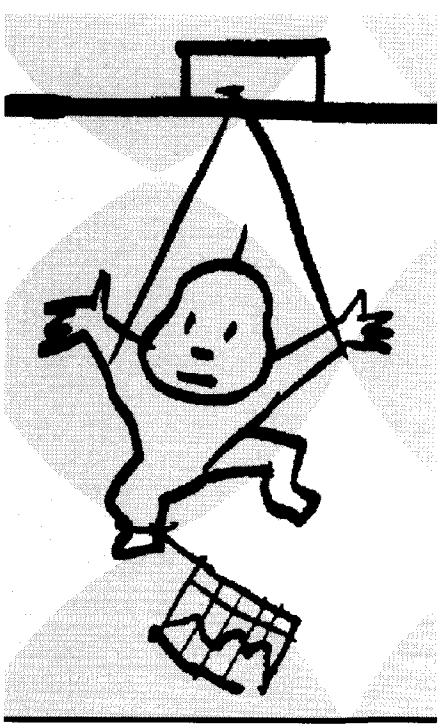
In September of 1991, James Lyon Bérubé was born with a chromosomal anomaly, Trisomy 21. This is a condition in which the twenty-first chromosome, instead of deriving one half from each parent, actually contains additional parental genetic material. This third component is probably the product of an earlier faulty cell division, a chromosomal nondisjunction.

For about a century after an English physician, J. Langdon Down, described certain clinical aspects of the condition, it was known as mongolism, the dubiously descriptive if not somewhat imperialistic term that seemed appropriate to his Victorian sensibilities. More recently, since the phenomenon is actually found in every race and ethnic group as well as in the higher primates, its human manifestation is now called Down (or, sometimes, Down's) syndrome. But this is not to say that the condition is of recent discovery: It has been recognized throughout all of history.

The significant change in the modern era is that, with antibiotics and sophisticated surgery, the survival rate for those afflicted has climbed significantly. For Dr. Down, 130 years ago, a newborn with the diagnosis could expect to live about ten years. Now the expectation includes adult years, middle age, and even old age.

Bérubé skillfully interweaves the story of Jamie's first months with astute discussion of the genetic as well as clinical aspects of his situation. Jamie was unbelievably lucky. In his first twenty days he barely evaded surgeries of the heart, throat, and stomach. Raising a child has never been easy. But when that nurture requires herculean effort (for example, feeding by a nasal tube inserted while listening with a stethoscope to be sure the tube has not found its way into the lungs rather than the stomach), and this is coupled with the knowledge that the future remains as inscrutable as ever, the most fundamental questions are put into play.

While the memoir of Jamie's first years is both moving and engrossing, the story is told within the larger context of an intelligent wonder. Bérubé marvels at the fact that Jamie's first seventeen days cost $30,000. Because the family was covered by a generously comprehensive employer-provided health plan, this cost never became a part of any consideration to treat or not to treat. As Jamie has gone on from that early merry-go-round of medical catastrophe to the daily round of routine pediatric care, early infant stimulation, day care, and, by now, education, he is the direct beneficiary of prodigious resources.



Bérubé writes with care and feeling about the fact that, when offered the possibility of an amniocentesis early in the pregnancy, he and his wife coolly rejected that diagnostic tool because at her age, according to the odds, the chances of actually conceiving and carrying to term a baby with Down syndrome were about the same as having a miscarriage induced by the procedure. Bérubé then embarks on a provocative analysis of the prolife, prochoice controversy, a discussion which produces difficult questions and few if any easy answers. Because this book is about one child in one family, neither prochoice nor prolife partisans will find anything like unequivocal support. From one who would not be in this situation had he and his wife elected amniocentesis and then the early abortion which probably would have been recommended, this is a valuable discussion. And to this reader it is not at all certain, had some diagnostic procedure revealed Down syndrome, that an abortion would have been secured.

But after all is said and done, there remains one very rocky constant. As Bérubé puts it in discussing the availability of health care in this country, "we're all in this one together." There is a persisting national habit of thought which assumes that "bad things"—birth defects, head and spinal injuries, misadventures of any kind—all happen to other folks. To put the discussion into the context of the debates on abortion or child welfare, for example, every child must have the resources necessary to thrive in an adequate and appropriate manner. In short, such things can and do happen to anyone.

Bérubé takes great care to demonstrate that a diagnosis of Down syndrome is descriptive but not necessarily predictive. At one time, a time that I certainly remember, such a diagnosis led to an automatic prescription, delivered with all the dignified vigor of lightning from on high: "This child must be institutionalized and the quicker the better." Then, in a wonderful manifestation of a self-fulfilling prophecy, this institutionalized population provided the data from which writers of textbooks

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blithely generalized to a prognosis for every child newly diagnosed with Down. And that prognosis, derived as it was from a socially and culturally deprived population, was grim indeed.

Any contemporary discussion of handicapping conditions that ignores the issue of abortion is naive. After all, since the introduction of amniocentesis several decades ago, it has been presented as a sure protection against the possibility of delivering a baby with Down syndrome. But the moral fact of the matter is really quite simple: While the possibility of securing an abortion is assured by order of the Supreme Court, in no case is an abortion mandated. Bérubé's concern is that parents like himself, who elect to forgo prenatal screening or who have the screening and then decline to abort a defective fetus, may some day be forced to decide differently in the name of "managed care." Having chosen a specific action, the parties concerned must still have the full resources—medical, educational, vocational, and residential—of this unimaginably rich society.

As he observes, "The danger [for children like Jamie] lies in the creation of a society that combines eugenics with enforced fiscal austerity....I do not want to see a world in which human life is judged by the kind of cost-benefit analysis that weeds out those least likely to attain self-sufficiency and to provide adequate 'returns' on social investments."

Bérubé concludes with the hope that he can set for Jamie a place at the table of the human family. In this hope, Jamie, like all other infants, has his rightful heritage. It is the most solemn obligation of all to guarantee that he, and every other child, will continue to enjoy that inheritance. □

Harold Isbell *is the translator of* Ovid: Heroides *(Penguin Books).*

SANDHOGS & SCOUNDRELS

Payback
Thomas Kelly
Alfred A. Knopf, $23, 273 pp.

Thomas Deignan

A page-turner buttressed by ethnic conflict, mob vengeance, and the twists and turns of family loyalty, *Payback* is a violent tour through some of New York City's least fashionable precincts. Thomas Kelly's evocation of Manhattan's West Side and the North Bronx, which to this day maintain a large Irish presence of both old and new immigrants, makes this first novel a commendable fusion of sociology and crime fiction.

As *Payback* unfolds, the loyalties among Kelly's various ethnic, labor, and criminal organizations shift and collapse. As ruthless as his characters, the author spills blood generously, and fills the body bags with a reckless abandon, giving *Payback* a decidedly Hollywood feel. Of course, one reason *Payback* would translate to the screen quite well is its reliance on familiar, occasionally clichéd, premises and characterizations. At the center of the story are Billy and Paddy Adare, a sort of Hell's Kitchen resurrection of Cain and Abel. Billy, the good brother, has educated himself and is working union construction jobs while waiting to hear from Columbia Law School. Paddy, a former boxer, remains a top officer in Jack Tierney's criminal empire. Tierney is *Payback*'s chief heavy, a hood who "through creative use of threat and force...ran the lucrative construction rackets on the West Side." (Kelly himself is a former construction worker turned Fordham- and Harvard-educated union organizer.)

The novel, set in the economic boom of the 1980s, is loaded with trusty Irish-American signifiers, including generous amounts of drink, nostalgia, and rebel song, not to mention the requisite JFK portrait and crucifix hanging in grandfather Adare's Bronx apartment. Still, as a former "sandhog," Kelly depicts the insular life and work of New York's underground tunnel excavators with enough detail and feeling to make you want to wipe the sweat, grime, and dust from your own forehead.

Payback also registers an intense reverence for union workers, their humble lives and noble cause, and is wholly contemptuous of WASPs, the wealthy, suburbanites, yuppies, anti-union Reaganites, and even the educated Irish who attempt to erase their backgrounds. Thus, Billy's crisis is the imminent clash of the cosmopolitan world ahead of him and the close-knit world behind him. That has long been the crisis of many ethnic Catholics, from author and *Daily News* editor Pete Hamill to writer Richard Rodriguez, who were the first members of their families to go to college, to rub elbows with the well-spoken and well-scrubbed.

Kelly doesn't complicate things—we never meet a decent yuppie. Characterization and local color predominate, while the tension and mayhem of the plot is moved to the fore. Still, a noirish condemnation of Reagan-era greed is implicit in the story, and Kelly does probe the difficulties that the Reagan mystique presented to many blue-collar Democrats, even having the portrait of JFK in one Irish home replaced with that of Reagan.

The novel shifts into high gear when it becomes clear that Jack Tierney has turned on Paddy. At this point, the expansive, nearly Dickensian cast of characters begins to dwindle in a succession of bloody executions. This occurs as Billy's union calls a strike, which itself allows for the odd bit of bomb-throwing and gunplay. Family members are threatened or killed, chases through tenements and subway stations ensue, and hostages are taken, setting the stage for a final, decisive showdown.

At its best, *Payback* is a well-structured, tautly paced yarn of murder and politics, labor and ethnicity, long on action if short on subtlety. Occasionally heavy-handed and two-dimensional, *Payback*

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is nonetheless a credible peek into an unsavory, unfamiliar world, an improvement, for example, on the rather flat 1990 Sean Penn film *State of Grace*, which also explored modern Irish gangs from the West Side.

It is something of a mystery why, after a century-and-a-half of Irish presence and influence in what's been called the "most Irish city in the union," there has never been a canonical Irish-American novel of New York City, no Irish *Call It Sleep*, or New York *Studs Lonigan*. Although *Payback* doesn't aspire to these heights, its conflicting attitudes toward education may begin to explain this gaping cultural hole. And Kelly does bring at least some of the knowledge that Henry Roth and James T. Farrell brought to their respective masterpieces: that despite the multitudes, the big city can be a very small place, and that despite the bright lights, a city's best stories are usually found in the shadows—or even underground. □

Tom Deignan *teaches American cultural studies at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. His writing has appeared in the* Irish Voice *and other publications.*

PRIDE & PROPHECY

Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky
René Girard, edited and translated by James G. Williams
Crossroad, $24.95, 168 pp.

Bernard G. Prusak

Dostoevsky's characters are often vile things, grotesques, caricatures of human beings. They do not belong to families or communities, but exist—abstractly, precariously—beaten back onto themselves, fixated and obsessed. "I am a sick man," begins the *Notes from Underground*. And yes he is: sick and sickening. "I never managed to become even an insect." Too bad, we might want to say: rather than bother us, he might have flown away or been squashed like Kafka's metamorphosized Gregor.

But Dostoevsky's "underground" people do exist, and they talk and talk and talk, and sometimes kill. They are gadflies and scorpions and—according to the philosopher René Girard—the darker side of ourselves as well. Taking the narrator of the *Notes* at his word, Girard proposes that Dostoevsky's characters only "push to extremes...what you yourselves would dare to take only halfway." They reveal the hidden, rotten truths good citizens like to paper over: as Girard also puts it, the logic of "tendencies and propensities present in all human beings."

Girard has been elaborating upon this thesis since the early 1960s. Indeed, there has developed over the last twenty years something of a "Girardian" system, propagated by a gang of "Girardians." Last year, in respective rites of consecration in France and in the United States (where Girard has lived for fifty years), the French Academy recognized his lifetime *œuvre*, and Crossroad published a *Girard Reader*, edited by James G. Williams. *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, published in French in 1963, is the latest of his books to appear in translation. It is by no means, however, *passé*. Though Girard has gone on to bigger and better things, here his thinking is cutting and fresh. This book not only illuminates Dostoevsky's novels, but provides us another perspective on Girard's career.

For Girard, "It is not the disincarnate thought that interests us but the thought embodied in the novels." He does not dismantle Dostoevsky's novels into philosophical propositions or ideas, but seeks to draw out the logic governing Dostoevsky's characters.

Girard begins with the fact that Dostoevsky's characters aspire to originality: They want to be *somebody*. But they suffer from a paradox. Though they fancy themselves to exist apart from the world—to be uniquely special—they need and crave its recognition. They can only be *somebody* if others play along. As Girard reflects, "[P]ride is essentially contradictory, self-divided and torn between the Self and the Other." They are catapulted, then, into an awful but all-too-everyday game of king of the hill.

It is Girard's signal insight that such "conflicts of desire keep occurring not because strongly individualized desires strongly oppose one another, but for the opposite reason." To be *somebody*, Dostoevsky's characters must do and say the things outstanding persons do and say. So they must copy the same desires. But copying engenders rivalry; "mimetic desire," as Girard calls it, terminates in violence or scapegoating, petty or not. What is sick here, though, is that "the *against* precedes the *for*." Dostoevsky's characters feel the need to distinguish themselves *against* others, but besides this principle cannot say what *for*.

Like Dostoevsky, Girard is unrelenting. He exposes, finally, the machinations of fanatical pride in apparent humility; he defrocks, as self-exalting, the piety of renunciation. In the end, Girard argues, Dostoevsky "reveals the exile, the rupture, the suffering" that flow from pride. But his art is also "literally prophetic." He calls us back from idolatry; he reminds us, writes Girard, that "[a]t the heart of everything there is always human pride or God." This book therefore anticipates both Girard's theological "turn" and the "Girardian" thesis that Christ saves us from the vortex of violence that is, otherwise, the first and last word of human culture. If we can believe that God so loved the world, and every one of us, that he became incarnate and suffered even death, then the need for recognition tumbles away.

Now this makes for an attractive *apologia*, but it is a hard pill to swallow. Is the cult of the self endemic to all cultures,

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or a sickness afflicting only particular ones? Girard acknowledges that, "in the course of history, Western individualism took over little by little the prerogatives that had belonged to God." But this is a historically and culturally specific claim. I wonder if Girard's thought is not, ironically, basically still "egocentric": Everything swirls back to the self, however "intersubjective" it has become. How the self goes, so goes the world. Of course it is we as selves who act, but there is little sense here of institutions as creative bodies—of families, communities, companies, countries fostering authentic interest, God or not. Dostoevsky gives the lie to the self's bad faith; but I am unwilling to agree that he thereby gives us the key to the riddle of life. Surely it is messier and more variant.

Whatever the persuasiveness of Girard's thinking, it demonstrates that being *somebody* is, at times, a more complicated and counterintuitive production than we might think. As Americans, we jealously guard *our* rights and cultivate *our* particularities. But who loses? In this regard, it is pertinent to recall that Ralph Ellison wrote, in his 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man*, "I associated [my narrator], ever so distantly, with the narrator of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*." □

Bernard G. Prusak *is* Commonweal's *1996–97 editorial intern. He is currently translating Dominique Janicaud's* The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology *for Fordham University Press.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

dollars by choosing Stony Brook. Rochester's experience was that, in a one-on-one competition with SUNY, half the students to whom we offered financial aid enrolled at Rochester, half at SUNY; all the students not eligible for aid because of high family income went to SUNY. Of course I speak from a private university bias, but I believe that SUNY would benefit from higher tuition accompanied by significant financial aid directed to the needy. Put most (too) provocatively: Is public higher education a service to the poor, or a middle-class welfare benefit (like most welfare benefits in America)?

The financial crisis for higher education is real, and fervent liberal arts pieties or pleas for the poor will not win the day. My concern is that faculty and administrators have not yet recognized the depth of the crisis and the urgency of reform to preserve the liberal arts and establish a rational funding structure. In higher education we seem to ignore the warning of James Thurber's young friend, "We can't bury our head in the sand like kangaroos, you know!"

DENNIS O'BRIEN

Women & everything

The feminist movement of the 1970s (or the '50s or the '60s) was a highly contextual movement. For some it may have been a one- or two-note set of issues; for others it was about everything. As the letters from Mary Lou Quinn and Carol Dellman-Andersen [March 28] indicate,there are some issues from those years which have just not gone away, contrary to the views of Mary Ann Glendon and Margaret O'Brien Steinfels.

Readers have experiences that differ from those of editors and writers; that is why they write. I often find their responses more fascinating than the original articles. These readers deserve our respect and thanks.

MARIE PICARD
Aurora, Ohio

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9701	January 17, 1997
9702	January 31
9703	February 14
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9706	March 28
9707	April 11
9708	April 25
9709	May 9
9710	May 23
9711	June 6
9712	June 20
9713	July 18
9714	August 15
9715	September 12
9716	September 26
9717	October 10
9718	October 24
9719	November 7
9720	November 21
9721	December 5
9722	December 19
9801	January 16, 1998

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WHAT, ME JEWISH?

Aaron W. Godfrey

Madeleine Albright's discovery of her Jewish roots brought back how I discovered my own Jewish roots, which I should have realized earlier but did not.

My father, a devout Episcopalian, married my mother, an Irish Catholic, just before the Depression. Since he was over fifty when he married, he was not the typical parent—no sports or movies. We did go on walks and he lectured me on things I only half heard, which came back after his death to close the circle. He died when I was fourteen, and I realize now that I never knew him well.

When he was alive, I remember summer visitors from Europe—cousins "with funny accents"—who would stay at a hotel and come for dinner. They shook hands with the children as we gratefully retreated to our rooms. After my father's death, there was little contact with his family. We became much poorer and moved to the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, to be absorbed by Irish-Catholic culture. Part of this culture was an irrational anticommunism that spilled over into anti-Semitism and took seriously pre-Vatican II Good Friday prayers for "the perfidious Jews."

In those years, Flatbush was divided between Catholics and Jews, without much interaction. Most Catholics went to parish grammar schools and Catholic high schools. It seemed to me that Jewish children did well academically, played instruments, and went to museums. The Irish Catholics did sports, and at eighteen began to frequent bars, which became the center of social activity.

I absorbed much of the anti-Semitism that was implied in local Brooklyn church teaching. We read *The Merchant of Venice* in sophomore year, and, of course, Shylock was presented to us as the villain. The teacher reminded us that even contemporary Jews shared some of the same characteristics. Resentment in Brooklyn was intensified by the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), which prevented discrimination in hiring. There were inflammatory editorials in the diocesan paper, *The Tablet*, which informed readers that FEPC was pushed through with Jewish influence. What we didn't realize at the time was that it also put an end to the "No Irish Need Apply" syndrome in many upscale banks and brokerage houses on Wall Street.

Somehow I made it through two years of college with my anti-Semitism intact when I received a rude shock from one of my aunts. After I had made an offensive anti-Semitic remark, she sat me down and lectured me on prejudice, hitting me between the eyes with the revelation that my paternal grandmother, who was dead long before I was born, was Jewish. My ancestors had come to this country from Germany after the political upheavals of 1848, had changed their family names, and had downplayed their religious affiliation. My father—being naturally religious as an adolescent—joined a Presbyterian congregation and essentially "passed" because of his English surname. He was successful to the extent that he was admitted to Princeton. At that time, the university accepted neither Catholics nor Jews as a matter of policy.

Fortunately, my shock turned to laughter when I realized the absurdity of prejudice and remembered remarks I had heard during walks with my father. But it took me several more years to realize that the European relatives who used to come to New York had probably perished in the concentration camps, and the details of my father's Jewish family were only filled out some years later by a cousin.

As a youngster, I never connected with my parents' conversations that didn't pertain directly to me. It happens with most young people who are totally involved in their own lives. Even though some of my classmates used to taunt me by calling me a Jew because of my first name, it took something more direct to bring it home to me.

I was raised as a Catholic and thoroughly indoctrinated in the church's teaching and practices. I sang with the Paulist Choristers, so that good aesthetics in worship and liturgy reinforced my faith. When the church was criticized, I remember the rebuttal that "no other institution could have survived with such bad priests and popes. That is exactly what has made it so special."

I can certainly understand that Secretary Albright did not completely connect with her Jewish roots. They were probably dimly perceived and at the periphery of her consciousness. Consequently, there was no need to dig more deeply to uncover them. Had I not been lectured by my aunt, I might never have known and might still be scarred by intolerance.

As it happens, I have been greatly enriched by the knowledge of my Jewish roots and it has prompted further study. I am thoroughly embarrassed by my former anti-Semitism, and the fact that it can still surface in unguarded moments. Last year, my youngest daughter was married at home in a ceremony witnessed by a priest and a rabbi. It was almost as if my life had come full circle as friends remarked how deeply moved they had been by the fusion of two ancient traditions. □

Aaron W. Godfrey *lectures in classics and comparative studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.*

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